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EDWIN OF DEIRA

BY

ALEXANDER SMITH

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CONTENTS.

Book I. 7

Book II. 53

Book III. 94

Book IV. 134

Torquil and Oona 179

Blaavin 187

EDWIN OF DEIRA.

BOOK I.

With hasty rein from off the bloody field
Prince Edwin with a score of followers fled
Toward King Redwald's border, — thither drawn
By hope, which was twin-brother to despair, —
The gray King Redwald, though to him unknown,
Long time his father's friend, who ruled a land
In peace beyond the vapour-burdened hills.
But Ethelbert upon the fliers swooped
Like peregrine on pigeons, striking down
And scattering. Edwin 'scaped, but 'scaped as one
Wet-fetlocked from the Morecambe tide, that brings

Sea-silence in an hour to wide-spread sands
Loud with pack-horses and the crack of whips,
And on the way the steed of steeds beloved
Burst noble heart and fell; and with a pang
Keener than that which oftentimes is felt
By human death-beds, Edwin left the corse
To draw the unseen raven from the sky;
Then, fearful lest the villages of men
Might babble of his steps to Ethelbert,
Certain to sweep that way with clouds of horse,
He sought rude wastes and heathy wildernesses
Through which the stagnant streams crept black and sour.
Once, coming on a string of traffickers,
With laden mules bound for a town, he hid
Within the hollow of a ruined oak
Till the blue evening steaming from the ground
Made the star wink; then, signalled by the owl,
He from his hiding stole. When earth was red
With set of sun he passed into the land

Of reed and fen, by many a wing be-clanged,
And all the night he journeyed, while o'erhead
The windy heaven streamed from east to west,
And dim in vapour, keen in azure gulfs,
The feverish stars pressed forward to their bournes.
Midnighted thrice in wilderness, he saw
The far-meandering lake beneath the moon
Flicker in silver round a woody isle, —
The lake he oft had heard of. And he knew
Another day would bring him to the Court
Of the gray King who for his father's sake
Would shelter him in this his sore distress.

Next morning, from the sandy hills he saw
The bare blue desert of the sea flow out
In glittering wrinkles 'neath a cloudy dawn;
And when the sun burned through the mists, and grew
A mass of blinding splendour that outrayed,
He dipped into the valleys. On through woods,
And roadless meads, he passed, till at the hour

When fiercest is the light he weary came
To a ravine that broke down from the hill
With many a tumbled crag: a streamlet leapt
From stony shelf to shelf: the rocks were touched
By purple foxgloves, plumed by many a fern;
And all the soft green bottom of the gorge
Was strewn with hermit stones that sideways leaned,
Smooth-cheeked with emerald moss. Here Edwin paused
To quench his thirst, and rising, was aware
Of a gay youth that slid from off a rock
With cordial greeting and toward him came:
Slender as any girl: the golden hair,
That plenteously unto his shoulders hung,
Divided, gave to view a happy face
Pure red and white as apple-bloom on bough.
He was a page, he said, at Redwald's Court,
And going thither. "Thither go I, too,"
Quoth Edwin, "and have travelled since the morn.
If it mislikes thee not, companionship

Poor as my own may kill a weary mile."
So without further parley on they went, —
One blithe in spirit, and as gayly dight
As goldfinch swinging on a thistle-top;
The other sad of brow, and in attire
As homely as the sparrow that has chirped
Its whole life long upon a smoky thatch.
And as they walked, the stranger, full of life,
Grew garrulous on Redwald and his sons.
To him the Prince gave eager ear, though oft
The kingliness behind the cloud put out
A ray that dazzled, to be swift withdrawn.
"Redwald," he said, "was gray and sad of blood.
A man that, rooted in a bitter past,
Drew sap enough to keep the trunk alive,
But not enough to make the foliage green.
His seven sons, hound-footed, falcon-eyed,
The maddest men for hunting, who could rest
No more than could the winds." And then his speech
Brightened like water round a sunbeam. "Ah,

The Court is richest in a maid that comes
Like silence after hoof and bugle-blare;
Who owns the whitest hand, the sweetest cheek
Air touches, sunlight sees. And Time, like one
Who in the task delights, with every grace
And glow is dressing her, so that to-day
Shames yesterday, to-morrow shames to-day."
From this height soon he fell and 'gan rehearse
The petty spites and scandals of the Court:
How the King's frown had dimmed the warrior's arms,
How the proud lady scorned the faithful knight,
How all that day the forests would be loud
With hound and horn, how 't was the King's intent
That night to give a feast to all his lords,
Himself upon the dais. As Edwin winced,
The page turned, smiling. "See, my tongue runs on
Of court and courtier, princess, prince, and king,
Unmindful of thy business! Let me know.
Perchance in me resides some little power
To gain thee audience of a mighty lord,

Though in the stirrup were his hasty foot, —
Glad should I be." In strange sort Edwin smiled.
"What trade have such as I with mighty lords?
'T is with King Redwald that my business lies.
A king is like the unexcepting sun
That shines on all alike." Discoursing thus,
They entered on a broad and public way
Whereon were travellers and lively stir,
And now a maid, and now a knight went past
With light upon his armour; and at length,
The while the press was growing more and more,
They came upon the palace, vast in shade
Against the sunset. Noisy was the place
With train and retinue, and the cumbrous pomps
The feasters left without. The steeds were staked
Upon the sward, and from the gates the folk,
Busy as bees at entrance of a hive,
Swarmed in and out. Men lay upon the grass,
Men leaned with folded arms against the walls,
Men diced with eager hands and covetous eyes;

Men sat on grass with hauberk, greave, and helm,
And great bright sword, and as they sat they sang
The prowess of their masters deep in feast, —
How foremost in the chase he speared the boar,
How through the terrible battle press he rode,
Death following like a squire. Prince Edwin paused:
On his companion's shoulder laid his hand
With something like affection. "Here we part;
Thanks for thy courtesy. If I regain
That which my father on his death-bed left,
This day thou wilt remember. Fare thee well."
Thereat the page into the palace went:
But Edwin sat without till darkness came,
And dicers all had vanished; then he rose
And, entering, claimed an audience of the King,
For his was instant business, life and death.
The seneschals swift bustled to and fro
Regardless; but at last it reached the King
That the waste dark had given up a man
That sought his face and would not be denied:

Then, at his wish, the haggard Prince was led
To the great hall wherein was set the feast;
And at his step, from out the smoky glare
And gloom of guttering torches, weeping pitch,
A hundred bearded faces were upraised,
Flaming with mead: and from their masters' stools
Great dogs upstarting snarled; and from the dais,
The King, while wonder raised the eyebrow, asked
What man he was? what business brought him there?

When Edwin thus, the target of all eyes:

"One who has brothered with the ghostly bats,
That skim the twilight on their leathern wings,
And with the rooks that caw in airy towns;
One intimate with misery; who has known
The fiend that in the hind's pinched entrail sits
Devising treason and the death of kings, —
Famine the evil-visaged, — that once faced,
There is no terror left to scare a man.

Though my associates are the horrible shapes
That press on dying eyes in wildernesses
Where they must stare unclosed, this hand I stretch
Is native to the sceptre, knows its touch
Familiarly as thine. Though hunted like
Some noisome beast, that when it steals abroad
The cry spreads, and the village rises up
With sticks and stones to kill it, I have seen,
When I but oped my mouth, men look as if
It thundered in the air."

As from a crag
That rises sheer from out the fresh-blown surge
Upsprings a smoke of sea-fowl, puff on puff,
Until the air is dark with countless wings
And deaf with plumy clangour, from the feast
Broke laughter. When it ceased, the smiling King
With the intruder played. "Whence comest thou?
What king art thou? where doth thy kingdom lie?
In earth or air? and if indeed a king,

Though ne'er stood king in such unkingly plight,
Why hast thou been so strangely companied
By midnight and the owls?"

Then Edwin cried:

"O list fell hunger and the mountain wind
To the loud bruit of fed prosperity,
That never can be neighboured with distress!
No height so high, but you can fall from it.
Earth counts ten graves for every living man;
A single scroll contains our victories,
But 't is a dreary volume that the names
Of our defeats o'erflow. I was a king,
Have been destroyed in battle, lost my home,
Have fed on berries like the moorland birds;
Have drunk the stream that tameless creatures drink,—
Slept where I could. Thou ask'st me who I am?
From whence I come? From Deira do I come.
I am that Egbert's son who loved thee well.
Oft thou and he were tenants of one crib,—

Two growing apples reddening cheek to cheek
Upon the self-same bough, — two pebbles glazed
By the same wavelet's hand. In Egbert's name —
Egbert these twenty years in earth — his son
Claims shelter from thee."

When he ceased, and when
A murmur grew among the guests, wherein
Doubt with assurance clashed, the King arose,
A sudden flash of colour on his face,
Of which, if half was pleasure, half was shame,
And in the seeing of the spacious hall
Stepped down, took Edwin in his arms, while speech
Came like a hurrying brook that overlays
Eddy with eddy, watery swirl with swirl.
"Something of this I heard, as one immersed
In boundless woods the falling of a tree:
Who hears a sound, but cannot tell from whence,
Nor whether nibbling centuries of time
Or woodman's axe hath sapped it. 'T was *thy* fall!

'T was *thy* name rumour babbled indistinct!
And thou art come unto thy father's friend
For shelter! Thou shalt have it. Would that thou
Hadst asked for something costlier. So disguised!
So covered up! — but never murky cloud
Let slip so fair a sun! 'T is Fortune's trick
To muffle up her gifts in dusky hulls,
That, when they throw their mantles off, surprise
May richness over-double. Egbert's child!
Nay, his own self returned again to run
A large career of noble deeds, and reap
An aftermath of fame. It is a sight
To make me young again! While I peruse
The lips, the nose, the colour of the curls,
The build of brow, the contour of the cheek,
The wild-hawk eye, and when, as now, thou smil'st,
The face's sunbeam, — all this melts away,
And through the cloudiness of forty years
I see thy father and myself, when we,
Like twin lambs, raced across the meads of youth,

Happy as lambs, and innocent as they, —
While our young lives were bright as silks uncreased,
Or daggers newly gilt; the careless days
When life was May and full of singing birds;
Before that we had seen or kissed our wives;
Ere thou, young sir, wert thought of. Welcome here!
Although it were the son of my own loins
Long absent from these eyes, I could not grace
His coming with a single smile beyond
These now I give thee. Welcome, yet again!
But now have meats and drinks: the moorland fruits
And streams I thank, for hunger will enrich
This my poor table more than cups of gold.
Sit here beside me, 'twixt me and my sons, —
Nay, as thou art. At bed-time, doff these weeds.
Thou art a new-found jewel, and to-morrow
We'll have thee richly set."

Then Edwin stepped
Across the dogs that lay upon the floor,

With drowsy muzzles on their outstretched paws,
Oft starting into voice as if they chased
And bayed the boar in dream, and took his seat
On the right hand of Redwald, 'mong his sons,
A kingdom's strength upon a battle-day.
The lordliest game of forest and of hill
Made that board paradise, within whose smell
The phœnix appetite divinely died
Into a rarer life. Sheep, steer, and boar,
And stags that on the mountain took the dawn
High o'er the rising splendours of the mists,
Were plenteously there. All fowls that pierce
In wedge or caravan the lonely sky,
At winter's sleety whistle, heaped the feast;
With herons kept for kings, and swans that float
Like water-lilies on the glassy mere.
Nor these alone. All fish of glorious scale,
The fruits of English woods, and honey pure
Slow oozing from its labyrinthine cells,
And spacious horns of mead, — the blessed mead

That can unpack the laden heart of care, —
That climbs a heated reveller to the brain,
And sits there singing songs. And seated high,
'Mid torches' glare and glimmer, minstrels sang
Mailed gods of war, grim giants, kings who walked
In the gray dawn and morning light of time
Statured like towers; kings whose huge bulks of bone
Unmouldered, yet are seen in twilight caves,
Like some old galley with its sea-worn ribs
Half-sunk in ancient sands. And, while they sang
Of blazoned banners streaming on the wind,
Of arrows splintering on the brazen breast,
Swords red from point to hilt, — of trumpets blown,
Shred armour, floundering horses, cries of men, —
The light of battle burned in every eye,
Shouts burst from bearded lips bedrenched with mead,
Swords and cuirasses rusting on the wall
Clattered as life were in them. So the feast,
Led by the minstrels' scaling voice, and hand
In fury 'mong the harpstrings, roared, till dawn,

Let through a loophole, fell on torches burned,
The upset goblets of the deep debauch,
Lords tumbled on the rushes.

But long ere that
The King, with Edwin and his seven sons,
Left the fierce feasters maddening with the song.
A spacious chamber facing to the east
Was Edwin's, who threw down his weary length,
And, like a fallen column, slept till morn.
Then touched by earliest beam, he, waking, stared
With a blank eyeball, troubled as a man
Who dies in sleep and wakes in another world.
The chamber broke upon him weird and strange, —
He knew not what had been, or where he was, —
Till, like the lightning, come and gone at once,
Swift memory supplied the missing link
And knit him with himself. He rose at last,
Unbreathed on by the cold ungracious air
That lives in waste and wilderness, and saw

A pile of raiment in the chamber, heaped
In fold and golden crease. Enclothed, he shone
Like some gay kingfisher whose flight illumes
A river's sandy bank. His rich cap lay
Upon the rushes when the king came in,
With a "good morrow" in his face and eye.
Well pleased, he laughed, "So, so, the grub has cracked
To a rare butterfly! Didst rest as well
When thou wert ligging 'neath the round-eyed owl,
And heard him scold his brethren of the waste?
Come with me to the lads, for they at noon
Will fly their falcons, and the sport will be
The gayer for thy presence." Then he led,
Through a passage, toward a noise of dogs
That ever nearer grew, and entered straight
A mighty chamber hung with horn and head;
Its floor bestrewn with arrows, as if War,
Grown weary of his trade, had there disrobed
And thrown his quiver down. And in the midst
The brothers stood in hunting gear, and stroked

Great brindled dogs, that leapt about their knees,
And talked of them the while, and called to mind
How this one charged the lowering mountain bull,
What time he stood affronted in the glade
And the spurned earth flew round him in his rage;
How the boar's tusk made that one yelp and limp
The day he came upon him in the brake.
"Lads," quoth the King, still holding Edwin's hand,
"I've brought a fair companion for your sport.
Strive which can bend the stiffest bow, which train
The swiftest hound, the highest-towering hawk."
While welcome danced within their cordial eyes,
While one by one they grasped the Prince's hand,
And while the dogs, suspicious, sniffed his heel,
And while an eager babble broke of hawk
And steed and hound, and arrow-head and spear,
In at the door a moment peeped a girl,
Fair as a rose-tree growing thwart a gap
Of ruin, seen against the blue when one
Is dipped in dungeon gloom; and Redwald called,

And at the call she through the chamber came,
And laid a golden head and blushing cheek
Against his breast. He clasped his withered hands
Fondly upon her head, and bent it back,
As one might bend a downward-looking flower
To make its perfect beauty visible,
Then kissed her mouth and cheek. "My little one,
A morsel to these lion whelps of mine,
Yet pearl to pebble, precious gold to iron,
There came last night a stranger to our Court,
Who brought with him a face from out the grave,
And with an ancient friendship warmed my heart.
He stands in centre of thy brethren there,
Worthy thy dearest greeting." As she turned
(Half breaking from the arms that softly held)
A happy blushing face, with yellow hair
And sweet eyes azure as the flaxen flower,
The dim air brightened round her, and her voice
Brake into silver welcome, then so stopped
That its surcease was to the ear what light

Withdrawn is to the eye. The Prince, through all
The hurry of his pulse, returned her grace
In ceremonious phrases, — stately set,
Cold in themselves, yet tinged as by a dawn
Of coming passion, — when the King broke in,
Words that a kiss foreran: "Now go, my girl;
Thou shouldst be very fair; thy coming stole
Thy mother from me. After last night's bout,
Day will be grateful to our heated brows.
Our guests have gone, a fiery throat with each
That will no more let stream go by unlapped
Than thirsty dogs in July. Whilst we go,
Thou canst the story of thy wrongs relate,
And then rejoin the lads." So, with these words,
Redwald led Edwin forth.

And while they walked
Toward the rookery, the Prince rehearsed
How Ethelbert, tolled on by plunder's bell,
Wasted his borders for these many years;

How when, a month ago, the routing boar
Pierced to his kingdom's heart, in haste he hid
His mother, with the women and their broods,
Within the secret places of the hills,
And raised a host; and how, one summer's day,
His squadrons dashed upon the iron foe
Effectless as the rainy flaws that smoke
On precipices that o'erfrown the vale;
And how, at a most dismal set of sun,
He saw his files lie on the bloody field
Like swathes of grass, and knew that all was lost;
And how, when the pursuit grew fierce and fell,
A hut he entered, blazoned like a king,
And issued thence a peasant; how he fled
For days and nights toward his father's friend,
Till, as he knew, last night a famished man
He burst upon the feast. At this he dashed
Fierce tears aside, that broke upon a cheek
Stormily crimson, as the light that burns
Upon the bellied, wry-necked thunder-cloud,

Rearing itself from out the inky east
Against the spokes of sunset, and he cried:

"Though earth and heaven both had knit their hands
To grant my wishes, I would only ask
To be once more before him host to host!
Ye iron destinies that rule the world,
From injury preserve him till that day!
From knife, disease, and heaven's snaky fire
That licks up life like water, keep him free!
For every limb of that same Ethelbert
Is dearer unto me than to his Queen;
She never pined for him in all her love,
Or cursed the hours that kept them separate,
As I do in my hate. O, I could kill him
Fondly as e'er she kissed him! King, my realm
Is sorrow and the memory of wrong;
My courtiers are the ghosts of happiness.
Yet unmixed evil lives not. Fallen low,
I see a new proportion in the world,

And hear another murmur of events.
Although the wafture of its muffled vans
Be noiseless as the downy owlet's flight,
I hear thy coming ruin climb the wind.
In me as in a mirror see thyself.
Fear this, wild Ethelbert. 'T is not my cause
Alone I plead, but every prince's cause.
This man would break down all our diadems,
And with the gold and jewels build his own.
He has a stomach for us all. Nor think
In him ambition is a phantasy
Of idleness engendered, and as frail
As stream of summer vapour, which the crag
Tears with its horns, the sunlight can drink up.
For years within his dark and constant mind
The monstrous thing has grown. No hand but Death's
Can root it out. 'T is like a poisonous tree
For ages anchored in a castle wall,
Whose gnarled and fingery roots so clutch the stones,
That, plucked up, all is ruin. Well, what then?

Better the arrow stayed upon the string
Than shivered on the breastplate."

Edwin's words
Came like a mountain torrent swollen with rain
Adown a long ravine of cataracts,
Ending one chafe of foam. The King replied,
In measured words devolving smooth as oil:

"I need not say, in earnest of my love,
Were I assured it would thee reinstate,
In the red hand of War I 'd strike my own,
And clasp it as a friend's. Were I assured —
Alas! my heart is like a troubled seer,
And speaks a cloudy language. Ethelbert
Is strong in towns and men, — most subtle-brained,
Most proud of heart, — yet roughly generous
To those that with submission flatter him.
Before the forthright motion of the wind
Bend like the sapling; when 't has overblown,

Erect thyself at pleasure. For myself,
Thou hast a boding eye that can discern
A tempest brewing in the sunny noon.
If a portentous cloud should climb the sky,
(Though I protest I see no present sign,)
Some shelter will be found ere o'er my head
It splits in rain and fire. Why search for ills
That wander o'er the wilds of phantasy,
Which, if we seek not, we may never see?
Be not downcast, although the heavens frown;
The gods oft use us as we use our babes,
And snatch our plaything from us for a time;
Be patient, 't is returned. Perversely fight,
The frail thing oft is broken. Do not fear;
Prosperity, like the swallow, comes and goes:
To-day there is the ruinous clay and straw;
To-morrow, sweetest twitterings fill the eaves.
The wretch plunged knee-deep in the whirling drift
Cannot believe in summer, yet it comes
With all its singing birds. Remember, Time

Works often to some fair accomplishment
Which we, impatient, purblind, cannot see,
And in our eagerness stretch forth a hand,
And that one act mars all."

Then Edwin cried:

"There is scant comfort in thy words. No more
The births of time we can prognosticate,
Than the next phantom of a madman's brain;
Or than the shape that yonder travelling cloud —
Now to my fancy headed like a wolf —
Will crumble into next. Most wretched he,
Unreasoning Chance's pensioner, who lives,
Like the blind beggar at the highway side,
On alms of passers-by. I have been taught
The world is nothing but a mass of means, —
We have but what we make; that every good
Is locked by nature in a granite hand
Sheer labour must unclench. The forest-trees, —
Do they fall round us into builded homes

Without an axe or arm? The blowing winds
Are but our servants when we hoist a sail.
O Redwald, Redwald! be not like the owl
That dozes with a wise and solemn face
In its own midnight, in the blaze of day.
Not for myself I speak, but all for thee.
The ravening wolf hath burst into the fold
Of peaceful kingdoms; 't is the untouched herd,
Not the torn carcass, that hath cause to fear.
Thou yet art standing in thy pride of place,
I've known misfortune's worst; and, like a soul
Refuged by death from all calamity,
Nothing can hurt me more."

Then Redwald's face
Grew troubled, for his spirit, peering out
Into the future, blenched at something there.
Uneasily he spake. "Draw once the sword,
In a strange world 't is sheathed. When war-winds blow,
Kingdoms break up like clouds. I would thee serve,

But dare not set my dwelling in a blaze
To warm thy hands. But let this end to-day:
In private council I will take the thing,
And do not doubt that, through the voluble throng
Of diverse reasons, love for thee will plead,
An advocate silver-tongued. Come now, the lads
Will fly their hawks at noon."

Then, like a man
That brings a painful interview to end,
Turned on his heel the King, and instant went
Toward the Palace. Edwin at his side
Walked, with ignited heart that fumed within,
Slow climbing to a clear, bright flame of rage.
Both silent. When they reached the Palace front,
The brothers stood about the gate with grooms
And steeds, and falconers with hooded hawks,
Eager to ride. And Redwald, with pleased eyes,
Gazed on that carcanet of noble youth,
The poorest of whose seven precious stones

Would have enriched a realm, till Edwin sprang
Into the saddle, and away they rode
Toward the mass of woodland in the west;
And when the last gay rider disappeared,
Within his countenance pleasure's fire went out,
And left it dark. He entered full of thought.
With muffled sound, fair glimmered man and horse
Down forest aisles, bedipt from plume to hoof
In dancing light and shade; and issuing thence
As from a roof, the riders burst in day
On an uneven waste of hillocked sand,
Shagged with rude grass, and patched with withered furze,
With the great dazzle of the sea in front.
And as along they rode, though Edwin flashed
The general gladness back, as sea the sun,
Kept up the game while each derided each,
Paying gay jest with jest, — 't was like a man
High-capering to no music, — for the wit
Ached at the heart, and loud his laughter rose

To hide its want of joy. Some three leagues on,
Taking the wind upon a purple moor,
The happy Princes, riding hitherto
Close as a clump of primroses, broke up
And curvetted in twos; and as they broke,
Regner, the rose of all the wreath of sons,
Spurred his horse up to Edwin's, drew the talk
Slowly from this and that, to last night's feast,
Thence to the overthrow, and by what means
The pit-maker should fall into the pit,
The ruiner be ruined. Riding thus, —
Prince Edwin lightening with his wrongs, the while,
By the true virtue of an open ear
Blonde Regner drew the grief that stagnated
In bitterness about the heart away, — they dipped
Down on a shining water-course, that led
To mountains closely drawn, and came at length
On a great boulder, black with pine, flung down
In the gorge's throat; and, rounding it, they split
A second time. Like pearls upon a string,

Each after each, they thrid a ruinous glen,
All silence, toppling crag, and falling stream,
Where nothing moved except the vapoury smoke
From the abyss, or slowly crawling cloud
That hardly can sustain its weight of rain,
Eating the sunshine up and blackening all —
Since earthquake passed that way. At last they reached
The gloomy tenant of that gloomy place,
A lake of sadness, seldom sunned, that stretched
In sullen silver from a marge of reeds
To far-flung gloom of precipice and peak,
That on the northern side kept back the day.
As on the ruined shore the eight drew rein,
Uprose the startled heron with a scream,
Waking the echoes of that region dern;
And Edwin, with a stranger's privilege,
First threw his hawk. Then Regner, riding near,
Watching his countenance, caught his eye, and cried,
"When 'gainst the heron Ethelbert thou fliest,
I follow in thy track, come weal, come woe!"

And, rising fiercely in his stirrup, flung
His falcon into air. A glorious sight
To see them scale the heaven in lessening rings
Till they as motes became: while here and there
About the strand the eager brethren rode,
With shaded faces upturned to the blue,
Now crying, "This one has it!" and now, "That!"
When suddenly, from out the dizzy sky,
Dropped screaming hawks and heron locked in fight,
Leaving a track of plumes upon the air.
Down came they struggling, wing and beak and claw,
And splashed beyond the rushes in the mere.
Amid the widening circles, to the waist
A falconer dashed, and drew to shore the birds,
All dead save Edwin's falcon, that, with claws
Struck through the heron's neck, yet pecked and tore,
Unsated in its fierceness. Regner laughed
At the weird omen, though his colour rose.
"I cannot guess," quoth he, "how this will come,
Unless I with thee to the battle ride,

So *that* is fixed. Brave falcon, with thy heart
Burst on thy foeman's bill!" He gave his steed
The spur to hide his face. His brethren stood
Dashed for the moment; and no more that day
Was falcon thrown from fist into the sky,
Or from its airy poisings to the lure
Brought with a whistle. Soon the dreary lake
Lost princely voice and clang of iron hoof,
And as the six rode on, the omen died
And was entombed in laughter; farther on,
Heading the riders down the ruinous vale,
Regner and Edwin moved abreast, while love
Grew up between them purely, — all untouched
By haughtiness, or thought of selfish end;
The noble love that lives in noble men;
That is ashamed of its own nakedness,
And hides itself in deeds, — would not be seen,
And tongueless lives and dies. And riding thus
Toward the palace, Regner talked of days
When all would be at peace within the land,

And each man have his own inheritance,
Be it cot or citied realm: and how they twain,
When crowned kings, would through the country ride,
Teaching civility and raising man,
Till on the highway there should not be heard
A rude word, and till gold might lie untouched.

So talking, Edwin knew that they approached
The palace: neither mount, nor stream, nor tree,
Nor landmark, noted as they rode at morn,
Foretold its nearness, but a heart that swam
In new delight, like summer setting suns
In colour. As they rode, between the twain
Speech died; and, when the billowy woods drew off,
And gave the palace clear in afternoon,
Its turrets rose in a delicious clime,
And sacred as her garment's hem had grown,
Its utmost pale and limit. As they came,
The noise of hoofs brought Redwald to the door,
A shallow ray of welcome in his face

That faded soon. Like one preoccupied
With his own thoughts, he asked, What sport? whose hawk
Had highest towered? which struck the quarry down?
And heeded not the answer when it came.
All the dismounted princes then he led
To a great board set forth with meats and drinks,
And as he sat and carved before them all,
And as the talk rose high among the sons,
His face to Edwin — who with anxious eye
Sought there the future — seemed a doubtful day
Beyond the skill of prophet to predict
Whether 't would darken into thunder-shower
Or clear to azure and a golden set,
With promise of fair morrows. Moody-browed
He sat at feast and moody-browed he rose
And went out, leaving Edwin and his sons.
Then, after interval of sportive talk,
Regner brought all the table to the hall
Where in the morning he had stood with dogs;

But changed its grisly furniture, for now
Twilight had settled down upon the world,
And in the red and winking fagot light
Now flashed a spear-head, and now gleamed a brand.
The seven soon were busy here and there, —
Some diced, one played with spearhead, one with hound.
But Edwin, feathering arrows, sat apart,
For all the piled-up anguish — visible
As some high hanging tempest, which the sun
Holds back at noon, but which, when that same sun
Goes out like a red ember in the west,
Settles down bodily, a double night,
And pours through all the hollows of the hills
With voices in the blackness and the blast —
Covered him up, and in his soul he cursed
The purblind King, incapable to pierce
The curtain of a sunset, and descry
The angry-featured morn that lowered behind.
And, as they sat, and redder grew the hall,

The Princess came and sang as was her wont,
And as it chanced that night a tale of love,—
Of love new-born and trembling like an Eve
Within a paradise all wide and strange
At the most perilous sweetness of herself
But one short moment known. And while her voice
Went wandering through a maze of melody,
The hand lay where it fell, and ceased the breath,
And finer grew the listening face. And when,
Like a leaf's wavering course through the autumn air,
The wildered melancholy music ceased,
And silence from a rack of keen delight
Unstretched their spirits to their grosser moods
And common occupations, she arose
With music lingering in her face, and eyes
That seemed to look through surfaces of things,
And would have thence withdrawn from out the hall;
But Regner caught her twixt his mighty knees,
Proud of her innocence and gentle ways,
Impatient half that she was not a glede

Fire-eyed to peck his fingers. "Tush!" he cried,
Breaking in laughter like a wave in foam,
"Thy music trembles like a yearling fawn
At its own shadow. Evermore of love
Thou singest, as if love made up the world
And men were pigeons cooing on a thatch.
Was hand and arm like this of mine but made
To circle waists and finger maiden hair?
Although this love be all thou sing'st, methinks
'T is something to be first to spear the boar,
'T is something to have heart enough to keep
A friend, and strength enough to kill a foe.
Happy thy husband, Bertha, in his hall
Sitting unscolded, while each enterprise
That might have made him great unheeded streams
Like wild swans overhead. A gentle wife
With yellow-headed children round thy knees,—
Aha, our lily leaps into a rose!
What! struggling like a very sheep in pen
Beneath the shears!" While gazed the throncless Prince

With idle fingers on the feathered shaft,
While she, flushed rosy-red, broke loose and fled,
And while great Regner's loving laugh pursued,
Sudden, all heaven, immeasurably sweet,
Sank downward on his heart, and filled it full
As crimson fills a rose.

Then, while they slept,
The feverish heart within his body lay
Awake, and slave to giddy fear and hope,
'T was blown from life to death, from heaven to hell,
A hundred times ere morn. But when the dawn
Flowed from the eastern cloud, and chamber wall,
And window white, and passion's fiery self
Wavered and lost their forms, and swam away,
Like watery circles, into nothing, she
Came floating in upon a stream of sleep,
And, smiling, breathed the sacredest delight
Through all his soul. Ah, dawn among thy stars,
Yet linger, scare not with thy broadening ray
The paradise our father Adam knew!

Sudden above the shoulder of the world
The broad sun bounced and flung his shafts abroad:
One quivered redly on the dewy lawns,
One broke in rose along a mountain range,
One fired the cloud, and lark beneath the cloud.
And in the wide effulgence Edwin woke,
With heart sweet thrilling, like a string from which
The hand has vanished, though the tone is yet
By silence undevoured. And, when the sun
Had in succincter splendour turned his face
Noonwards, the Prince arose, and sought the hall;
And, after frank "Good morrow" from the sons,
And graver greeting from the King, and touch
Of Bertha's hand,—the while from eye and lip
Broke sunlight for a moment, and was gone,—
He put aside a plan by Regner urged,
To kill the noon, on score of weariness.
And when the King had gone, and when the sons,
With six or seven great dogs at their heels,
He, with a mighty thirst to be alone,

To weed his heart of perilous delight, —
For this new passion seemed unnatural
As winter breeding roses, — stole unseen
From gate, and hid himself within the woods,
That billowed on and on toward the west;
And after roaming many a shadowy way,
He found a green recess, a sheltered nook,
Where many a family of violets dim
Sweetened the forest twilight with their breaths
Through mossy centuries unsmelt by man.
Covered with secrecy and silence there,
While Time sailed on, and never beat a wing,
All Nature fed his madness. Solitude
Spake with her voice, and Memory wore her face,
And in the thick-leaved murmur overhead
"Bertha" was shaped forever. Starting up,
For his delight he feared as 't were a fiend
In angel's shape, with cruel-lovely eyes
That fascinate a man against his will,
Drawing him onward to some horrible brink,

He left the massy coverture of leaves,
That whispered like a tempter, and sought peace
And some deliverance from his heart on wold,
Brown waste, and sea-shore. But the world was full
Of Bertha as a trembling string with sound:
The shallow stream upon its pebble-stones
Was babbling "Bertha, Bertha!" all the air,
Like his own brain, was singing with her voice;
And every cliff and mount her beauty knew,
And looked on him in passion. Worn at length,
He reached the palace, black against a west
Yet crimson with the memory of the sun,
And, passing through the hall, he heard, amid
A crowd of youths that lay about the fire,
Relaxed from chase, one talk about a stag
That day seen in the woods, the noblest brute
That ever antlers wore, and Regner's vow
That, though the chase should stretch o'er half the land,
The head would hang upon his trophied walls
Ere set another sun. Like bows unbent

The tired youths lay. But Regner, looking up,
Saw Edwin passing, and toward him came,
With a most gay reproachfulness of tone,
But not the less reproachful that it wore
A sprightly colour. "All the day," quoth he,
"I have been looking for thee, and each sport
Renounced for want of heart in it. Come, now,
By all the friendship as we rode last night,
And by the better day we look for still,
Do not forsake me so. I'd rather walk
With thee through shower, than with another man
Through all the summer sunshine. We are men,
Not women, and our hearts should never dwell
Upon our tongues, — yet as the thing is said,
Let it remain. What can I do to kill
The tedium of the time? A mighty stag,
(A forester has brought the welcome news,)
Lairs in our woods to-night. Then in the morn,
As early as thy sluggardy will let,
Wilt thou with Bertha and the rest of us

Ride, for his antlers I have vowed to win?"
To him Prince Edwin, with a kindly face:
"I 'll stir, so please thee, ere the youngling birds;
And may to-morrow prove the goodliest day
Of a whole wreath of hunting-days. Thy love
Is to me, Regner, justly dear; and, though
I did account it less, I am too poor
To put it lightly by." He then adduced
For his retirement weariness and weight
Of anxious thought, and to his chamber went.
When, after preparation for the morn,
The circle broke to bed, and while the horn
Was blowing shrilly through the hunter's dreams,
(For passion is a substance vaporous,
That cannot hold its shape a single hour,)
Prince Edwin sat upon his couch, with hands
Lax hanging on his knees, while all his love
Seemed hopeless as the feasts a famished man
Beholds in dream; as brilliant and as frail
As wondrous imagery of fruit and flower

Wrought by the frost upon the window-pane
At night, while wolds are steaming white and chill,
That in the morning runs a blur of tears.

BOOK II.

So when the light was springing in the east,
Unkennelled staghounds bayed, men's voices rose,
Steeds pawed and clanked their bridles. Then, equipped
In hunting-gear, Prince Edwin and the rest
Trooped forth with spirits gay as their attire;
And with the dawn, and like another dawn,
But fairer, Bertha came. Amid the dogs
They mounted, and the instant that the sun
Stood on the hill-tops, prodigal of light,
They rode with wondrous clatter on their way;
And ever as they in their joyous haste
Skirted dim forest, forded shallow stream, —
In which the sun had thrown a spear that lay
Golden on amber pebbles, — pushed o'er heath,

The sound that gayly travelled on before
Woke all things ere they came. For when afar,
At instance of a strong-lunged forester,
The sudden bugle on the rosy cliff
Was splintered into echoes, from the marsh
The heron screaming rose; within his wood
The mountain bull stood listening to the sound,
Silent as lowering thunder, when the winds
Are choked, and leaves hang dead; and from his lair
Rose, with dew-dappled flanks, the stag, and snuffed
Their coming in the wind, a moment stood,
His speed in all his limbs; but when the pack
Dragged with them down the echoes of the vale
And opened out, he fled, with antlers laid
Along his back like ears. Halloo and horn
Broke then upon the breeze. Now on his flight
By flying wood, o'er wastes, thro' streams that splashed
High o'er the saddle-girths, the hunters hung,
And ever, as a slowly burning fire,
Consumed the space between. And, as it happed,

When the increasing sun grew hot and strong
In an impetuous whirl of stormy chase,
The Prince and Bertha were alike thrown out.
The rest ne'er drew a rein, for now the troop,
With long-haired Regner far in the advance,
Was pressing hard upon the weary brute,
Sore-panting, black with sweat. Around a crag,
That with its gloomy pines o'erhung the vale,
Swept hunt and hunter out of sight and sound.
They were alone, and in the sudden calm,
When round them came the murmur of the woods
Upon a sweeping sigh of summer wind, —
O moment dying ere a cymbal's clash!
O memory enough to sweeten death! —
The unexpected solitude surprised
His heart to utterance, and the Princess sat
Blinded and crimson as the opening rose
That feels yet sees not day. Then, while the wind
To his quick heart grew still, and every leaf
Was watchful ear and eye, he pressed his lips

Upon the fairest hand in all the world
Once. That instant, like an envious fate
That rushes through, dissevering clinging joys,
A distance-muffled bugle sang *à mort;*
His courser started to his iron heel;
And ere the blush had died on Bertha's cheek,
And ere her eyes could bear the conscious day,
They reached the crag with its black scalp of pines:
Rounding, they saw the end. For on a rock
That rose fern-fringed and lichened in a dell,
Tall Regner stood. "Ye twain have lost a sight!
With bursting heart he turned upon us here,
Desperate in death. Upon him climbed the dogs
To drop off gored. He would have beat them, too,
Had not I on him drawn my hunting-knife.
He came down like a pine!"
So, after rest,
Homeward through prime of noon the hunters wound;
The Princess rode with dewy drooping eyes
And heightened colour. Voice and clang of hoof,

And all the clatter as they sounded on,
Became a noisy nothing in her ear,
A world removed. The woman's heart that woke
Within the girlish bosom — ah! too soon! —
Filled her with fear and strangeness; for the path,
Familiar to her childhood, and to still
And maiden thoughts, upon a sudden dipped
To an unknown sweet land of delicate light
Divinely aired, but where each rose and leaf
Was trembling, as if haunted by a dread
Of coming thunder. Changed in one quick hour
From bud to rose, from child to woman, love
Silenced her spirit, as the swelling brine
From out the far Atlantic makes a hush
Within the channels of the careless stream,
That erst ran chattering with the pebble-stones.
Somewhat in front rode on the happy Prince;
His heart was frozen on that battle-day
To one wild thought of vengeance, and stood still
Like a stopped clock, aye pointing to one hour

Through days of gloom and shine. But now the hate
And ancient sorrow, piled up cloud on cloud,
Lost form, and in an ecstasy dissolved,
In wandering blood that knew itself beloved,
And with the tidings ran to pulse and nerve
And thrilled them. Once again the light was sweet,
The lark sang, and the hedge wore scent and bloom,
And in his spirits' morning light, a word,
A hunter's jest, the nothings of discourse,
Were things to play with in his happiness,
As they were golden toys. So, when they reached
The palace gate, and Bertha had gone in,
Taking the sunshine with her, Edwin flung
The reins impatient on his courser's neck,
Broke through the crowd of losels gathered round,
And sought the loneliness of wood and field
To listen to the nightingale that sang
Within his heart of love and love's delight;
And on it sang till, through enkindled air,
The heron flapped toward his forest home

With gullet full of fish. Returning then
Slow-paced, and miser of his own delight,
While lovely shapes of summer twilight stole
From tree-root and from hollow, and joined hands
In silence on the plain, he reached at last
The palace, stiller than its wont, and would
Have entered, but from out the solid gloom,
Flung from an overhanging eave, the Page
Who met him by the rock-split streamlet, broke,
With finger on his lip: "O enter not!
The place is trapped and baited for thy life.
The hate of Ethelbert is round thee here.
I know thy story as it hath been noised,
And that the King is troubled by thy case,
And would, and yet would not. So when at noon,
In absence of the Princes and thyself,
There came one seeking Redwald, travel-stained,
I was alert as a hind's ear to catch
The danger in the wind. I hid myself
Within the private chamber, where the King

Gives his selectest audience. When they came,
Without a pause, the strange man opened out
His treacherous purpose with a shameless brow,
And guessing, as I deemed, the King was weak,
And must in any strife go to the wall,
Or that the coward dwelling in his heart
Would prove the ally in the house, and fling
Out to the foe the keys of every gate,
He scorned to lacquer the accursed thing
(Which in the first flush of its hideousness,
Like a fanged snake, might make a man shriek out)
With glozing speech. And wisely. Deeds like these
Corrupt in their excuses. Ethelbert,
I gathered from their converse, having heard
That thou art come for shelter to the court,
(Ill fall the little bird that sang the news,)
Threats war on Redwald if he stands thy friend, —
Sharp war that will not spare a living thing.
If he betrays thee, gold is his, and part
Of thy dismembered kingdom. Long they talked, —

I heard the chink of golden argument,
While Redwald's mind swayed this way now, now that,
And now he would betray thee, now defend.
Thus hearing, from my hiding-place I stole
To warn thee hence if not indeed too late.
There is no time to lose. This very night
The foul thing may be done; strange whispers pass
Throughout the palace. Openly his sons
Marvel at what's afoot. This moment fly, —
I know the secretest sequestered paths
And hiding-places that ne'er saw the day."

As nightmared man — when solid-seeming ground
Breaks downward in a cliff precipitous
And on the sheer edge leaves him, dizzy-brained,
Toppling o'er death — strives to regain the morn
And the sweet healthy world, Prince Edwin strove
In coils of monstrous evil, and at last,
Trampling the foul thing underfoot, he smiled.

"I owe thee many thanks for thy regard,
And for this cruel kindness more than all.
Out of thy love for me, thou urgest flight, —
The falcon hath its nature and the dove,
And by that nature is each motion shaped
And every beat of wing. Thy master's hearth
Hath warmed me, at his table have I fed,
Drunk of his cup, and 't were the vil'st return
By hasty flight to call him traitorous
To dead and living. Doubtless, this bad hour
But swims a vapour o'er the heavenly lights
That will be clear anon. But if, indeed,
His spirit harbours murder, — if the knife
Has bloody fascination for the hand, —
I have no power to cover up my throat,
'T is naked to its using."

Then the Page:

"Remain awhile within the friendly dark,
And ere the thing draws to a wicked head,
Poisoned and fanged, and raised in act to sting,

I will rejoin thee here, and lead thee far;
And, if it melts in nothingness away,
I'll be the blithest bearer of good news
That ever ran. So cloak thyself in night.
I will into the palace, where I'll tread
With foot of air, made up of ears and eyes."

When he was gone, the Prince, with heavy heart,
Not knowing what to do or where to turn,
Sat on a stone, a bow-shot from the gate,
Sore troubled. In his cloak he wrapt his face,
Like one who hears the coming foot of doom
And waits the end. Hour passed on tardy hour,
And in the dreary middle of the night
The late moon rose, and then he groaning said:

"Ah, miserable me! My soldiers bleach
Beneath the moon, and she who bore me sleeps
On flint beside the waterfall, begirt
By widows, and by children, and by all

The congregated sorrow of a realm
Most sorrowful. And I, who can alone
Bring to my people roof-tree, fire, and law,
And build again for them an ordered state,
Sit here an outcast, and the door is shut.
And Ethelbert, my deadly foe, like air
Enclips me round, and there is no escape.
Ah, wretched! for to me the healthy world
Is poisoned and deranged; where'er I go
Worth turns to baseness; and sweet love itself,
That dwells with weary hinds, and makes the load
To the galled shoulder lighter, brandishes
With snow-soft arm a burning torch for me,
That but reveals the face of a despair
That darkling stood, and all my prison's strength,—
A prison wide as the unbounded world,
Whose walls are my own life. To-day I've fallen
From summer, and the song-bird and the rose,
To a dark ground, exempt from light, that breathes
The earthy horror of a new-made grave,

And those who should be unto me as friends
Stretch hands to push me in. So let it be:
Death heads the mighty count of human ills,
And every man can die. And in the grave
All hatred and revenge are baulked at last;
No smiles that murder hide, no star of love
Lighting my steps to ruin, no bloodhound
Hoarse baying on my track, can ever more
Disturb my quiet. A great sea of peace,
On which was never boat nor puff of wind,
'Twixt me and sorrow flows."

Thereat down pressed
With grief he forward leaned, as forward leans
The bulrush when the stream runs swift with rain.
Thus like one carved he sat, till suddenly
He felt upon him breathe an icy wind,
And with an unknown terror every hair
From heel to scalp arise; then looking up

He saw in that lone place a dark-robed man
Stand like a pillar in the setting moon;
And at the sight Prince Edwin's heart stood still.

"What man art thou, that sitt'st on this cold stone
When every bird, its head beneath its wing,
Is sound asleep upon the forest-bough?"

"It matters little where I sit o' nights."

"I know thy name, and why thou sittest here.
I saw thee sleeping on the naked ground,
With but a rainy sky for coverlet.
I know thy story and the things thou fear'st;
What wouldst thou give if I turned Redwald's heart,
And made him draw the sword in thy defence?"

"I have not much, but I would give thee all."

"What if I clothe thy limbs with mightiness?

What if, in far days when thou tak'st the field
Beneath thine ancient banner wide displayed,
I give thee spoil and captive? If I give
Her soft voice to thine ear, her lips to thine,
Her white arms to thy neck?"

"O, mock not so
My sharp distress: for any good I'll be
Most answerably grateful."

"If I build
Thy throne secure against the flaws of time?
If I send teachers that will teach thee more
Of the dark world that lies beyond the grave
Than if thy father's ghost did speak with thee,—
Teachers as never king in England had?"

"Who speaks with me?" cried Edwin, starting up.
"Thy voice is like a trumpet, that proclaims
Something, I know not what: but at the sound,
Through pallid ash, the embers of my hope
Have burst in flame. I tremble at the brightness."

"Who speaks with thee, thou canst not know as yet;
But," here he laid his hand on Edwin's head,
"When next this sign upon thy body comes,
The promise thou hast given me remember."

And lo! before the Prince could utter word,
The moon had fallen and the man was gone.

He knew it was a spirit with him talked;
And, like an idol-stone uncouthly hewn
In image of a man, the astonished Prince
Sat folded in his cloak, the while the words
Went wandering through the regions of his mind,
Like thunder 'mong far hills. Slowly the woods
Came out in ghastly glimmer, slowly dawn
Stained the horizon with a beamless red.
And when the risen sun outstretched his lance
O'er dewy earth, a sound of voices stirred
Around the palace and unfroze his limbs.
And as the world swam back into his brain,

He threw the darkness with his mantle off,
And started at the morning's lucid walls
Grown up in silence round him. And the Page,
Right in the glory of the level beam,
Came running from the shadowed palace-gate,
Dawn in his face, and called him with a voice
Sweeter than any grove of singing birds
That ever waved, an emerald of May.
"O Prince, unto the palace come again.
The messenger has gone with angry heart,
And like a cobwebbed banner from its nook,
Where it has hung for ages, taken down
And streaming in the wind, the King cries, 'War!'
In the rude shaking of the boughs, rich fruit
Will tumble in our laps." And then the Prince,
With an unfluttered countenance and eye,
Like one who has already heard the news,
Arose and followed him within the gate.

They reached the chamber hung with horn and head,

Antler and weapon, where Redwald up and down,
Much troubled, paced with quick, impatient starts.
Bertha sat weeping, but the brothers stood,
Their bold hearts tingling to the stirring time;
Its light was in their faces, like proud crags
High up, that wear the morning ere it comes.
The King turned sharply as the Prince approached:
"Whether to bless or curse the hour I know not
That blew thee here, for everything hath clashed
In broil since then; things unconceived have bred
Their strangest opposites, as eagles doves,
And fruit-trees poison. I, that did thee love,
Have listened with no inattentive ear
To the sweet music of the minted gold
That foul betrayal urged; and I, that clung
To peace, — that fattens beeves, and tills the mead,
And fills the bursting barns with harvest-home, —
Have, like a passionate whipster, drawn a sword
That fruitless blood must paint. In even poise
The issue hung; and, lo! a chitling's tears —

This lily thrown into the trembling scale,
The heavier only by some dewy drops —
Makes wisdom kick the beam. Within my heart
There beats another heart that is not mine:
I go, but like a steed that chafing goes.
I am an arrow, by some unknown hand
Drawn tensely to a mark. Here yestermorn,
As now thou know'st, a man came from thy foe
With gold in one hand, in the other war,
Demanding me to give thy body up.
I kept thee, and chose war. So take my sons,
My towns, my horses, arms, and goodly men;
Enclothe thyself in all my kingdom's strength,
And try the hazard of a bloody field,
Which will, I doubt not, to the right incline,
And with its dust at sunset shape a throne,
Which, howsoe'er it turn, must cost me dear.
And now, what can I more?" And while the King
Went on thus chafing, Edwin's sleepless heart
Grew silent, as an eagle's famished brood

Huddled upon a ledge of rosy dawn,
When sudden in the blinding radiance hangs
Their mighty dam, a kid within her grip,
Borne off from valleys filled with twilight cold
That know not yet the morn. Yet somewhat sore
At Redwald's cautious balancings and doubts,
He fiercely spoke: "I do suspect me, King,
The selfsame wind that pushed me out to sea
Now blows me into port. Yet, as I hold
The golden apple in my fortunate palm,
I need not all too curiously inquire
Upon what bough it grew." At that, Remorse,
In generous crimson, rushed to cheek and brow,
And shook his voice. "Redwald, I could thee thank
Upon the gratefullest knees that ever knelt
On ground. But though these words of thine surpass
All other sounds that ever reached my ear,
As angels men, I thrill with no surprise;
For, sitting on a stone without thy gate
When gold was being weighed against my life,

I knew a morning fair as this would break,
And to this interview I walked assured,
As one who hath been absent but a day
Into his house, where table, bed, and stool
Have places kept since childhood. And I know
This morn is prologue to a happy act:
The future rises like a curtain up,
And, shadow-like, I see a battle won
And a recovered throne. And once more, King,
A world thou 'st given me wherein to live;
I also crave the dawn to make it fair,
To gild its forest tops, to light its streams,
To set a rainbow in its cloudy gloom,
To fill its soft, green vales with tender light,
That I may see the work grow 'neath my hands, —
Thy daughter whom I love."

At the King's feet
She sat, and, hearing, over neck and brow
Brake morning; and, as love is faced like fear,
Or wears fear's mask, she hid her own and shrank;

And, shrinking, like a sudden burst of light,
The unimprisoned splendour of her hair
In coil on coil of heavy ringlets fell,
And veiled the face that burned through hands close pressed,
And clothed her to the knee. The King down glanced,
And caught the sweet confusion, while his spleen
Went out in words, like thunder's dying groan,
When tempest passes, and reveals again
The azure and the sun. "And dost thou, too,
Fret in thy nest's confinement, and desire
To flit away into the boundless world,
And range therein with some gay-feathered mate
The summer through? We fathers are the soil
In which a second generation grows:
From our decrease it draws the youthful sap
That keeps it green atop. Nay, weep not, girl!
Press not against my knee in that wild way
A cheek all flame and tears. I cannot chide:
It is the very order of the world;

We have our seasons, even as the flowers.
And I, when I did once a daughter seek,
Made thick a father's heart. Some twenty years,
This hour may be thine own. Most gladly, Prince,
When time hath tried thy steadfastness of heart,
And when the wayward fowl, Prosperity,
Roosts in thy boughs, I 'll see her wife of thine,
Wearing with thee the crown. So, sweet, arise,
And give the man thy heart hath chosen out
From all his fellows a pure hand in pledge
Of faithfulness, — the one assured thing
He ever will possess upon the earth."
She heard, and, all untouched by virgin shame,
False and unworthy then, erect she stood
Before her father and her brethren seven,
Pale as her robe, and in her cloudless eyes
Love, to which death and time are vapoury veils
That hide not other worlds, and stretched a hand,
Which Edwin held, and kissed before them all
In passionate reverence; smitten dumb by thanks

And noble shame of his unworthiness,
And sense of happiness o'erdue. And while
The Prince's lips still lingered on the hand
That never more could pluck a simple flower
But he was somehow mixed up in the act,
She faltered, like a lark beneath the sun
Poised on the summit of its airy flight,
And, sinking to a lower beauteous range
Of tears and maiden blushes, sought the arms
That sheltered her from childhood, and hid there,
Shaken by happy sobs. "Prince," quoth the King,
The while his palm lay on the golden head,
"I count myself this day most fortunate
In that, by the sweet ministry of love,
(Which was to me invisible as spring,
Shaping itself beneath the winter's white,)
I see the future fairly form and flow
From happy throne to throne. I am no more
A cliff that fronts a waste abyss of air, —
Beyond me seem to glimmer cultured fields

And a continued world. My heart feels light
With children yet to be. But those sweet days
Are distant, and the present in our path
Stands like a grisly thistle spiked with spears,
That will draw blood from the bold hand that grasps.
I do remember me there was a time
When fight was keenlier wooed than any girl;
And, though my fires are wasted, even now
This withered hand is hankering for a lance, —
Even now these feeble knees compress a steed,
And the wild rank tears onward, — and I hear
The combat's music when great spears go crash,
When through the dust of fight the clarions blow,
And red blood springs. 'T is but an old man's dream,
And other hands must rule the battle now:
Take Regner to thy council: think it out.
Be wise, be wise, yet be not over-wise;
Plot like an old man, execute like youth;
We will discuss thy plans around the board.
Come, Bertha!" So they went, nor did love's sun

Vouchsafe a beam at parting.

Then the sons,
His brethren now, came crowding round the Prince
With joyful faces, and with many a wish
That the miraculously blossomed time
Would ne'er its vermeil promise falsify,
But come to happy fruit. And Regner threw
His arm round Edwin's neck, for elder love
Claimed a fond precedence, and, brother-linked,
They passed through gates to sunshine, and then struck
Adown a road, tree-shaded, silent both,
Though many a thought was stirring at their hearts.
At last, Prince Regner, on a ruined dyke,
Hoary with lichens, with each crevice bossed
And bulged with mossy emerald, sat, the while
The sunlight, broken by the thronging boughs,
Splashed his great limbs, and Edwin standing near,
And all the lonely greenness of the place.
Then turned he, smiling: "Edwin, when I dreamed
Of distant days when we twain should be kings,

Ruling our realms in peacefulness and joy,
Yet with the awe of justice intermixed, —
With a most perfect friendship, good to us,
And to our people ever issuing thence, —
I did not count on such a day as this,
In which the dearest sister in the world
Hath made us brothers, not in love alone,
But by the sweetest tie that ever knit
A man to man." Then, as a sudden wind
Swayed every bough, and broke the mass of light
Into a swarm of golden butterflies,
That danced and bickered o'er the velvet sward,
Then slowly grew to one, Prince Edwin said:
"I know that I am happy; I know not
How happy, — and I may not ever know!
I am as one engifted in a realm,
Whose wide unskirted boundaries and shores
He will not have encompassed round about
When he is hoary grown." Then Regner's laugh
Rang like the blackbird's whistle, loud and clear,

When all the woods are breathing after rain.
"It is a churlish bird that will not sing
Against the ray. Bridegroom will be bridegroom,"
The mirth died in his face as he went on.
"Thou wilt be my superior in this war;
At pointing of thy sword 't is mine to ride,
Though it point straight to death. Yet let me speak
Before I sink into a place wherein
My duty is obedience absolute.
The morning after thou didst on us burst
Like one on fire, telling the King thy wrongs,
In likeness of a harper with a harp,
I sent one privately to gather news.
Last night he came, and told me how distressed
Is that fair land in which thine enemy dwells;
How conflagrations redden every night,
And how the mead on which he halts a space
Looks, when he leaves it, as if charred by fire.
But now, by some fair wanton meshed and toiled,

The King a canvas town of pleasure spreads,
And lays his arms by for the moment. Well.
The voice now running through my father's land
Will make each knight collect his plump of spears,
The smith his hammer on the anvil leave,
The hind his lowing oxen in the trace,
And hither will they troop. King Ethelbert
Was drawing this way, when his heart was caught
By white arms, glittering eyes. Yon range of hills,
On which the heaven leans with rack and cloud,
Is all that stands between us. Swiftly lead
Thy files up through a world of mist, and crag,
And dashing waterfall, and from the height,
Upon the flushed King in the wanton's lap,
Drop like the thunderstone and crush him out, —
Him and his strength forever." Edwin then:
"But all the perilous passes! Canst thou guide?"
And Regner, bearing on like stream at flood:
"I know the region dwelling in the mist
As do the wild blasts penned within it; come,

And let us lay the thing before the King."
So they arose and to the palace walked,
Through wondrous fantasy of light and shade
That danced and glimmered with each sigh of wind,
And, entering, found a plenteous table spread;
And soon the King came in, and then the sons.
But Bertha's place was empty all the while.

Then, through the progress of the stately feast,
The question of the conduct of the war
Drew all discourse, and Regner opened out
His plan, and held it swiftest, simplest, best:
Affirmed that Ethelbert, in pleasure drowned,
Was helpless as a leveret in a snare;
That Edwin need not fear his guidance up,
For that he knew the misty mountain world
As the fierce torrent knows its native gorge,
Through which it has run white a thousand years.
With Regner every brother gave his voice;
The King was doubt-perplexed, and slowly moved,

Like a clogged wheel, till Edwin, who had sat
Silent among the talkers, suddenly,
Like a grave echo from a mountain height
That startles, gave his full adhesion in.
And, driven thus from point to point, the King
To half-enforced agreement warmed at last.
They rose from table when the midnight hung,
An emerald twilight up among the stars;
All night the Prince tossed restless on his couch,
With trumpets blowing in his ears, a sword
Haunting his hand; but with the whitening dawn
Sleep brought a shock of joy, for, out of waste
And formless horror, Ethelbert and he
Fell grappling, and in fight rolled o'er and o'er,
'Mid plunging horses, in a hug of death.

Then with the rising of the third day's sun,
As wave doth shoulder wave toward an isle
When thither sets the tide and blows the breeze,
Till in the silence of its central vale

Is heard the surgy murmur, troop on troop
Pressed round the palace; and Prince Edwin gazed
Down on the living sward, and saw a knight
Go pricking through the press in harness rich,
Dark groves of footmen standing in their ranks,
Mares whinnying from the stake, and from the wood,
Slow trickling through the light, a rill of spears.
And as he gazed upon the joyous scene
His forward-pushing spirit made his face
Pale, as a man's who, with a resolute heart,
Towers in the breach at daybreak, hand on hilt,
When shouting comes the foe. Descending then,
He found the King and all his seven sons
Standing in hall amid a hundred lords,
Brown-cheeked, fierce-eyed, long-bearded, mighty-limbed,
Who from each corner of the realm were bade
To battle, and who came as to a feast.
Walking from martial knot to knot that buzzed
With all the fiery pleasure of the time,

King Redwald made each chief to Edwin known,
Summed up the spears he brought, and proudly flashed
A hurried sunbeam o'er his foregone life,
That made each brave deed sparkle jewel-like,
And wandering up and down among the lords.
More loud the din of preparation grew, —
The sudden opening of a door let in
The neigh of steeds, clashed anvils, countless fires
Blistering the noontide air, and on the skirts
Of tumult, oft a coming trumpet blown.

And Bertha in an eastern turret sate,
That took the sunrise like a cliff, and heard
The steed neigh, and the coming trumpet blow.
And knowing that her life was being shaped
By Fate's dark hands, that heed not sob or tear,
Above the tumult, like a thing divine,
Arose her voice. To this effect she sang:

"On many pastures man can feed his heart;
He drinks the wine of travel to the lees,
His is the sceptre and the golden crown,
His is the strife and glory of the field;
But ours the empty couch on which he lay,
The listening at the gate for dreadful news,
The breaking heart, and binding up of wounds."

So all the land around the Palace glowed
With upward-striking fires when fell the night,
And shapes of men went flitting through the glare,
Gigantic. From the ruddy distance came
The hum of thousands, and steed neighed to steed:
The minstrels sang great battles to the lords,
But, in his hand the reins of all the host,
The Prince, with Redwald, Regner, and the rest,
Sat half the night discoursing, grave and sad,
For in the presence of the war each heart
Was clear and naked as a sword unsheathed.
The minstrels ceased, the Palace lights burned low,

The circle round the King arose at last.
Beside a thousand fires the army slept,
Except the watcher leaning on his spear,
Or when, affrighted by a falling brand,
A war-horse reared and snorted at the stake.

At the first wind of dawn the thousands woke
And rolled into their places, rank on rank,
Expectant, ready, shadowing large as groves;
But when the sun arose, and was afar
Mirrored in dewy lawns, a window oped,
At which King Redwald and his daughter stood
With eyes of sad farewell. A bugle's cry
Went tingling to the roots of every heart;
And, ere it died, from out the Palace gate
The Princess issued 'gainst the level rays
That burned on breast and helm, and at the sight
The host rocked like a forest in a storm,
The banners shook, with clash and cry they cheered
The lords of Battle. Then, as the army moved

Onward, like thunder's corrugated gloom
Rolling o'er desert hills, with fire reserved
For other lands, the wistful hearts and eyes
Of those within the silent Palace left
Hung on its dusty rear. Spears ceased to flash
And horns to sound. At height of noon it hung
Cloud-like upon a ridge; and as a cloud,
If the hot sun but touch it with a beam,
Crumbles into a livid dust of rain
Leaving the rock-line clear against the sky,
The shadow passed.
And nothing now stood 'twixt
The act and issue. And soft-plumaged Time,
That erewhile with a soundless wafture shot
From ruddy sunrise to all-swallowing night,
Fanned hearts to fever with his creaking wings.
Still as a rooted flower the Princess sate,
With face intense that ever searched the north
For the first glitter of returning spears.
The gray King whitened in the weary hours,

And watched, with vacant eyes, bewildered hands
That worked, and had forgot at what they worked:
Then at the simple carol of a bird
He started, with a scared look in his face,
As if he feared from out the invisible air
Something would break in fire. Each morn and eve
He questioned, like a voyager who knows
That land is somewhere hidden in the sky,
And, weary of the ocean's silence, thrusts
A haggard face into the eyes of dawn
And reads no news, and, when the long day falls
With its great torch of sunset o'er the west,
Revealing nothing, sickens. But afar,
On the sixth day, a courier was descried
Swift-hasting, like a solitary crow
Winging the empty heaven. Out of doors
The people, on a sudden impulse, shoaled
Impetuous, but only to be hurt
By the keen shaft the archer Sorrow sent
Before he came himself. The panting man

Caught these words from the top of difficult breath:
"The field is ours, — Prince Regner's ghost has fled, —
King Ethelbert is cold, and all his lords, —
They broke at sunset!" — As a rill is lost
In ocean's murmur, all the rest was drowned
In lamentation and a bitter cry;
And then, besurged by weeping multitudes,
The man was borne into the palace hall,
Where Bertha lay at the King's feet, while he
Stood up before them, mute and stony-eyed,
Like one so far o'ercome by sore distress
That he no sharpness knows, and can but wring
Piteous, incapable hands. And then the man
Rehearsed the story of the bitter field: —
"Hanging upon the midnight hill we saw
Their watch-fires dot the plain. Slow broke the morn,
All damp and rolling vapour, with no sun,
But in its place a moving smear of light,
And through the mist we heard a trumpet blow.
By mid-day we were on them ere they knew,

And Ethelbert, like some wild beast at bay,
Fought but to kill, while he was being killed.
For him Prince Edwin and Prince Regner sought;
And though so knit in love their noble hearts
That each would give the other all he had,
Yet each grudged each his death. So when the sun
Broke through the clouds at setting, on a mound,
Lifted in seeing of the swaying fight,
Stood Ethelbert, surrounded by his lords,
Known by his white steed and his diadem,
And by his golden armour blurred with blood.
'Gainst him with but a single score of knights
The Princes spurred. Many were ridden down
In shock of onset. Regner's horse was speared,
And, rearing with fore feet that pawed the sky,
Fell backward on his rider, in whose side
A thirsty arrow stuck. Prince Edwin then,
With axe and arm up to the elbow red,
Drove up his horse 'gainst Ethelbert's, and struck,
Crushing the diadem and head at once,

And rode him down, and spurned him with his hooves.
Then, as a tent when the main pole has snapped
Falls into ruin, all the army fell,
On the King's death. By this, the sun had set.
They fled before us, drove on drove, like sheep,
And Edwin, like one famishing for blood,
Headed the chase, and night held up her moon,
To light us to the slaying." While the tale
Was being told, the people silent stood,
But at its close their grief broke out afresh,
When some fond memory brought back Regner's face,
His gait, his voice, some cordial smile of his,
And all the frank and cunning ways he had
To steal a gazer's heart. The long day waned,
And at the mournful setting of the sun,
Up through the valley came the saddened files,
With Regner's body borne on levelled spears.
And when they laid the piteous burden down
Within the gate, with a most bitter cry
The loose-haired Bertha on it flung herself,

And strove, in sorrow's passionate unbelief,
To kiss dead lips to life. The hardest eyes
Oozed pitying dews. But when the ancient King
Was, like a child, led up to see his son,
With sense of woe in woe's own greatness drowned,
With some obscure instinct of reverence
For sorrow sacreder than any crown,
The weeping people stood round, hushed as death.

BOOK III.

Round Regner's mighty corse, upon the mound,
Prince Edwin and the brethren weeping stood
In the red dawn, while all the men hung back.
And Edwin, when he heard his charger neigh,
Clasped hastily their hands; and, having bade
The noblest man that e'er lay dead on field
A sad eternal farewell with his eyes,
He, with a slender following of knights,
Passed onwards through a solitary land,
O'er wastes that wore the silence of the sky,
O'er ferny hills that autumn rusts like iron.

And when he came into his ruined town,
The news spread swift as sunrise, — touched high moors,

And waterfalls that never iris wore,
And every natural fastness wherein men
Had flung themselves in haste, and stood at bay.
And, at the news, toward the blackened walls
Thin rills of people 'gan to trickle down
The barren slopes, uncertain; for each heart,
Like some frail bough from which an evil bird
Had fled on dusky wing at step and shout,
Was trembling even yet. And with the first
Of the returning folk, like one that steps
Sudden from mountain vapour, from a grief
That brooked no fellowship, his mother came,
With aspect unsubdued by woe, — nay, raised,
Like something smit by heaven's fire, and more
Majestic in its ruin than its prime:
More queenly — wearing sorrow's dreary crown,
And robed in bitter wrongs — than when she moved
In youthful beauty, and the diadem
Paled in more golden hair. The people fell
Back from her side in simple reverence,

And made a lane for sorrow. Tall she stood,
Like some old druid pillar by the sea,
Whose date no legend knows, with all its length
Eaten by foam-flakes and the arrowy salts
Blown blighting from the east, and wildly gazed
Upon the blackened ruins of her home,
Once loud with marriage joy, oft hushed by death,
With working nether lip, while native pride
Scorned weakness back into her heart, and strove
To shut a door on tears — in vain — she stretched
Fond arms of passion out, that Edwin sought
In sudden night, then weeping like a cloud
She hung upon his breast. Though dimmed awhile
By natural sadness, from that fond embrace
He raised a countenance like a rising sun, —
Such an infectious light was in his eye,
Such hope and courage in his resolute voice,
Such noble scorn of all calamity,
That from his glance it shrank, a fearful shade
That into naught dislimned. A difficult hour

To try the pith and spirit of a man!
For gathered there the helpless people stood,
Foolish and timorous as a plump of sheep
That shoots this way, now that, and only held
Compact by barking dog and shepherd's cry:
He, like a flame that rises on the wind,
Feeding on what it fights with, cried aloud:
"The robber that hath robbed us is struck down,
The fire that wasted us is quenched in blood!
Courage, my friends! new dwellings we will raise
And fairer, from these ashes!" Then, in mood
King-like, he grasped an axe, and first disturbed
The forest's silence with a falling pine.
The shock struck heart through the uncertain crowds;
Each spirit rose as from a weight relieved;
At once the hundreds were alive like ants,
Swift-swarming to repair their citadel,
Crushed by a heedless foot. Ere twice a month
The town arose, a palace in its midst,
And girdled round by horror-breathing pines,

From whose unwilling tops the vibrant wind
Drew a hoarse murmur like the wintry surge,
A temple stood, by deities made dark,
Whose ears were closed to dulcimer and lute,
Wide to the clash of shields. And all around
The voice of industry in wood and field
Came back again, like some old pleasant tune
Long broken off, renewed, or silver stream
That sinks in earth, then, reappearing, flows
A mirror for the flowers. Once more the smoke
Uncoiled itself in evening's crimson air,
Once more the kine from out the pasture lowed,
Again within the solitude of woods
The muffled axe was heard. But ever when
On Edwin's heart the apparition came,
The old familiar world that hummed around,
Like mountains hanging green within the mere
Disturbed by dimpling breeze or lone canoe,
Became a weird confusion, — something, nothing, —
Commixed and mingling in the spinning brain.

As months went by, his mother Donegild,
Though still a ruin, was a ruin sunned,
Whose rents and fissures tell of thunder-stroke,
But thunder long ago, — where pain is not,
But only, in the quiet summer light,
The gentleness of natural decay.
And in the silent lapse of prosperous time
The bow of Edwin's spirit was relaxed.
In evil days he was the mole that broke
The dangerous surges of calamity, —
Now wind and wave were down. The commonwealth
Was well cemented, and could stand alone,
Without his staying and supporting hand.
In the surcease of effort, love grew strong
And widened from that sweet point in the past,
As the pure pool of moonrise in the east
Soaks through the cloudy texture of the sky,
Till, in the tenderness of light, the woods
Grow flakes of blackness, and the monstrous forms
Of everlasting granite, clamped with iron,

Lose all their horror, and transfigured stand
Soft as the stuff of dreams. Across the hills
Time's gentle ministry was also felt;
For now the grassy mound of Regner's grave
Had grown a portion of the accustomed world,
Familiar as the shapes of distant hills,
And hardly moving sorrow more than they.
Drawn by a heart that boded happiness,
Thither Prince Edwin rode, with all his train,
Feasted a week, — the while the ancient King
Was clad with flowers of holiday, — and oft
In hall, in greenwood, 'neath the evening star,
In Bertha's half-turned ear, he chid delay,
For she was coy as is a backward spring
That will not take possession of delight
Nor all its buds disclose. And Redwald watched
With smiling eyes, remembering his own youth,
The amorous war of sunbeam and of snow,
And swore it was the way of bashful maids
To turn a sour face on the sweetest thing, —

To pine for love, and then, whene'er it comes,
Fly with a red, scared face. In his young days
Their mothers did the same. At last, the Prince
Drew the green bud to a sweet rosy tip,
Thence to the open flower; and when he went,
The death of Regner was made up. Again
King Redwald had his wreath of sons complete.

So, in the very depth of pleasant May,
When every hedge was milky white, the lark,
A speck against a cape of sunny cloud,
Yet heard o'er all the fields, — and when his heart
Made all the world as happy as itself, —
Prince Edwin, with a score of lusty knights,
Rode forth a bridegroom to bring home his bride.
Brave sight it was to see them on their way,
Their long white mantles ruffling in the wind,
Their jewelled bridles, horses keen as flame
Crushing the flowers to fragrance as they moved!
Now flashed they past the solitary crag,

Now glimmered through the forest's dewy gloom,
Now issued to the sun. The summer night
Hung o'er their tents within the valley pitched
Her transient pomp of stars. When that had paled,
And when the peaks of all the region stood
Like crimson islands in a sea of dawn,
They, yet in shadow, struck their canvas town,
For love shook slumber from him as a foe,
And would not be delayed. At height of noon,
When, shining from the woods afar in front,
The Prince beheld the Palace gates, his heart
Was lost in its own beatings, like a sound
In echoes. When the cavalcade drew near
To meet it, forth the princely brothers pranced,
In plume and golden scale; and when they met,
Sudden, from out the Palace, trumpets rang
Gay wedding music. Bertha, 'mong her maids,
Upstarted as she caught the happy sound,
Bright as a star that brightens 'gainst the night.
When forth she came the summer day was dimmed,

For all its sunshine sank into her hair,
Its azure in her eyes. The princely man
Lord of a happiness unknown, unknown,
Which cannot all be known for years and years, —
Uncomprehended as the shapes of hills
When one stands in the midst! A week went by,
Deepening from feast to feast; and, at the close,
The gray priest lifted up his solemn hands,
And two fair lives were sweetly blent in one,
As stream in stream. Then, once again, the knights
Were gathered fair as flowers upon the sward,
While in the distant chambers women wept,
And, crowding, blest the little golden head,
So soon to lie upon a stranger's breast,
And light that place no more. The gate stood wide, —
Forth Edwin came enclothed with happiness,
She trembled at the murmur and the stir
That heaved around: then, on a sudden, shrank,
When through the folds of downcast lids she felt
Burn on her face the wide and staring day,

And all the curious eyes. Her brothers cried,
When she was lifted on the milky steed:
"Ah! little one, 't will soon be dark to-night!
A hundred times we 'll miss thee in a day,
A hundred times we 'll rise up to thy call,
And want and emptiness will come on us!
Now, at the last, our love would hold thee back!
Let this kiss snap the cord! Cheer up, my girl;
We 'll come and see thee when thou hast a boy
To toss up proudly to his father's face,
To let him hear it crow!" Away they rode;
And still the brethren watched them from the door
Till purple distance took them. How she wept,
When, looking back, she saw the things she knew —
The Palace, streak of waterfall, the mead,
The gloomy belt of forest — fade away
Into the gray of mountains. With a chill
The wide, strange world swept round her, and she clung
Close to her husband's side. A silken tent
They spread for her, and for her tiring girls,

Upon the hills at sunset. All was hushed
Save Edwin, for the thought that Bertha slept
In that wild place, — roofed by the moaning wind,
The black blue midnight with its fiery pulse, —
So good, so precious, woke a tenderness
In which there lived uneasily a fear
That kept him still awake. And now, high up,
There burned upon the mountain's craggy top
Their journey's rosy signal. On they went;
And as the day advanced, upon a ridge,
They saw their home o'ershadowed by a cloud;
And, hanging but a moment on the steep,
A sunbeam touched it into dusty rain;
And lo! the town lay gleaming 'mong the woods,
And the wet shores were bright. As nigh they drew,
The town was emptied to its very babes,
And spread as thick as daisies o'er the fields.
The wind that swayed a thousand chestnut cones,
And sported in the surges of the rye,
Forgot its idle play, and, smit with love,

Dwelt in her fluttering robe. On every side
The people leapt like billows for a sight,
And closed behind, like waves behind a ship.
Yet in the very hubbub of the joy
A deepening hush went with her on her way;
She was a thing so exquisite, the hind
Felt his own rudeness; silent women blessed
The lady, as her beauty swam in eyes
Sweet with unwonted tears. Thro' crowds she passed,
Distributing a largess of her smiles;
And, as she entered through the Palace gate,
The wondrous sunshine died from out the air.
And everything resumed its common look,
The sun dropped down into the golden west,
Evening drew on apace; and round the fire
The people sat and talked of her who came
That day to dwell amongst them, and they praised
Her sweet face, saying she was good as fair.

So while the town hummed on as was its wont,

With mill, and wheel, and scythe, and lowing steer
In the green field; while, round a hundred hearths,
Brown Labour boasted of the mighty deeds
Done in the meadow swathes, and envy hissed
Its poison, that corroded all it touched,—
Rusting a neighbour's gold, mildewing wheat,
And blistering the pure skin of chastest maid,—
Edwin and Bertha sat in marriage joy
From all removed, as heavenly creatures winged,
Alit upon a hill-top near the sun,
When all the world is reft of man and town
By distance, and their hearts the silence fills.
Not long; for unto them, as unto all,
Down from love's height unto the world of men
Occasion called with many a sordid voice.
So forth they fared with sweetness in their hearts,
That took the sense of sharpness from the thorn.
Sweet is love's sun within the heavens alone,
But not less sweet when tempered by a cloud
Of daily duties! Love's elixir, drained

From out the pure and passionate cup of youth,
Is sweet; but better, providently used,
A few drops sprinkled in each common dish
Wherewith the human table is set forth,
Leavening all with heaven. Seated high
Among his people, on the lofty dais,
Dispensing judgment, — making woodlands ring
Behind a flying hart with hound and horn, —
Talking with workmen on the tawny sands,
'Mid skeletons of ships, how best the prow
May slice the big wave and shake off the foam, —
Edwin preserved a spirit, calm, composed,
Still as a river at the full of tide;
And in his eye there gathered deeper blue,
And beamed a warmer summer. And when sprang
The angry blood, at sloth, or fraud, or wrong,
Something of Bertha touched him into peace,
And swayed his voice. Among the people went
Queen Bertha, breathing gracious charities,
And saw but smiling faces; for the light

Aye looks on brightened colours. Like the dawn
(Beloved of all the happy, often sought
In the slow east by hollow eyes that watch)
She seemed to husked and clownish gratitude
That could but kneel and thank. Of industry
She was the fair exemplar, as she span
Among her maids; and every day she broke
Bread to the needy stranger at her gate.
All sloth and rudeness fled at her approach;
The women blushed and curtsied as she passed,
Preserving word and smile like precious gold;
And where on pillows clustered children's heads,
A shape of light she floated through their dreams.

But when the gentle Queen was growing pale
With the new life that stirred beneath her heart,
Her brethren rode up to the Palace gates.
Dismounting there, they greeted first the King,
Then kissed her every one. They brought with them
Another kingdom's wonders, which revived

And lived around the table; and their stay
Was that long summer's glorious hunting-time.
All day they roared like winds within the woods,
Kept every echo busy with their horns,
Coursed saddest wastes, and broke on lonely pools
With margins lily-paved, — that knew no change
Except the snowy convoluted cloud
Down flowing to new shapes without a sound.
One evening, when the hunters sat at feast
With Donegild and Edwin, and the Queen
In silent mood, compact of life and death,
Like day and night in twilight, out they broke
In speech, which, somewhat antic in attire,
Yet wore most true sincerity at heart.

One cried: "Dost thou remember when we dwelt
In the old world of blue transparent air
Beyond the hills, seven mighty beechen bolls,
The day reposing on our sultry heads,

And thou, the trembling windflower at our feet,
Which no rude wind dared wag till this man came?"

Another then took up the tender thread:
"We missed thee, little sister, as a man
Reft of the special jewel from his neck
With which he loved to play; and when his hand,
Unthinking, wanders to the empty place,
He starts to find it not!"

And then a third:

"Great changes have come o'er us since thou went'st.
The poor old father, with his grief-bleached head,
Still whitens; and the thought of Regner's death
Yet wears him as a torrent wears a hill.
There is no spring of life in these old men,
And the lopped branch can put forth no fresh leaves, —
As they are, they remain. Yet, thanks to Time,
Whose touch alone can numb the bitter wound,
Our Regner's coming would be now as strange,

And would as huge unfitness wear to all,
As did his going hence. The saddest grave
That ever tears kept green must sink at last
Unto the common level of the world;
Then o'er it runs a road."

And then a fourth:

"Ay, the old lamp is sorely scant of oil,
And gutters in the wind. A gentler hand
Than ours it needs to trim the fallen wick,
And shelter the still flame until it dies!"

And so they talked and talked about the past,
In which we mortals sweetly rooted stand.
Week after week their going was delayed,
Till the heath reddened on the rock, — till, like
One golden-mouthed, September preached decay
With all its painted woods. And ere they went,
In Bertha's fragrant bosom lay asleep
The sweetest babe that ever mother blest, —
A helpless thing, omnipotently weak;

Naked, yet stronger than a man in mail, —
That, with its new-born struggling sob and cry,
Softened the childless Palace, and unsealed
Fountains of love undreamed of. Tenderness
Made every arm a cradle, every voice
Soft as a cradle-song. Star-like it lay
In Donegild's dark lap, while o'er it she
Crooned, like a druid forest, weirdest songs.
And as one poring on a precious seed
Creates a phantom of the future plant
With odorous terraces of leaf and bloom,
Fairer perchance than ever sun will woo,
Edwin upon the infant gazed, until
Before him rose a nobly-statured man,
Unmarred by sloth, by all excess unstained,
Pure-hearted as a girl, whose edge of will
No stubborn grain could turn, — wise, resolute, —
The kingly crown his natural covering,
As matted hair the hind's. And Bertha hung
Over its slumber all the livelong day

As moveless as a willow that o'erdroops
A well, the while there is in all the world
Not wind enough to turn a silvered leaf.

So the boy throve into his second year,
And babbled like a brook, and fluttered o'er
The rushes, like a thing all wings, to meet
His father's coming, and be breathless caught
From the great foot up to the stormy beard,
And smothered there in kisses. And whene'er
Edwin and Bertha sat in grave discourse
Of threatened frontier and the kingdom's need,
If the blue eyes looked upward from their knees,
Their voices in a baby language broke
Down to his level, and the sceptre slipped
Unheeded from the hands that loved his curls
Far more to play with. Every day these twain —
Two misers with their gold in one fair chest
Enclosed — hung o'er him in his noonday sleep
Upon the wolf-skin, — blessed the tumbled hair,

Cheek pillow-dinted, little mouth half oped
With the serenest passage of pure breath,
Red as a rosebud pouting to a rose;
Eyelids that gave the slumber-misted blue;
One round arm doubled, while the other lay,
With dainty elbow dimpled like a cheek,
Beside a fallen plaything. Slumbering there,
The fondest dew of praises on him fell,
And the low cry with which he woke was stilled
By a proud mother's mouth.

Then, while the boy
Grew imitative as an echo, while
His mother passed beyond her girlish joys,
And sorrows transient as a summer shower
Chased by the laughing blue, and reached that peace
Of perfect love, that weather of the heart,
Which is the image of the windless days
When July sleeps within the golden air,
And the wheat ripens in its rank, — and while
King Edwin roamed the happiest Prince on ground, —

The black cloud floated over them and broke;
In spring-time when the trees were newly dressed,
When from its sleep came forth the snake, and when
The nestless cuckoo sought the sparrow's house,
Warm-lined in hawthorn hedge, and left her own
Among the turquoise eggs.

A robber clan
Dwelt in the wastes upon his kingdom's edge,
And harried many a homestead, many a farm;
So when the cry for succour reached the throne,
King Edwin rose, and with a cloud of horse
Passed suddenly into a townless land,
And fought the robbers there, and many slew,
And pushed the rest, confused, into a marsh
Where rose the leader's tower. There closely cooped
He stood at bay, like badger in his hole,
While men and dogs unearth him. At the last,
The bandits, hunger-clung, burned up with thirst,
Wild-eyed, and clad in rusty iron, came forth,
And offered Edwin, for the gift of life,

Horses and gold, and faithful following
Where'er he blew his trumpet. But the King,
With their death-warrant in his eye, broke out
Upon the troublers of the public weal,
And called them "liars, malefactors, knaves,
Ungracious creatures, countenanced like men,
Yet hearted, stomached, fanged, and clawed like beasts!
Mere kites and crows that pick the sheep's eyes out;
Mere wolves that prowl about the wattled folds,
With teeth that sharpen as the kidling bleats.
Worthless; who could destroy, but could not make.
Spoilers, who could contribute for the good
Of toiling villages and towns of men
But the rank greenness of their graves!" The crew,
Hearing themselves thus dedicate to death,
For pardon clamoured loudly, — begged for life,
Would water bear, hew wood, slave in the homes
Of him and of his people, — but the King
Was to all mercy inaccessible.
As a sheer precipice to clutching hands,

And hanged the rabble on the doddered oaks
That stunted grew, long lichened in the marsh,
And set the torch unto the leader's tower.
And while he sat upon his steed, and watched
The smoke of ruin rise up flecked with flame,
A man came with a letter from the Queen,
Which he broke open with a hurried hand,
And read within the saddle as he sat.
And as one walking on a pleasant way,
When tree and hedge are newly green with spring,
Sweet thoughts in heart, and eyes upon the grouud,
Pores suddenly on something at his foot,
That is not of the world in which he dwells,
And startles him into strangeness, so the King,
Perusing with a smile the loving words,
Stooped sudden down on this: —

"The strangest thing
Happed yesterday. For as I sat, a maid
Came with the news that one within the hall —
A poor, far-travelled man, whose face a sun

Warmer than ours had painted — o'er his food
Was railing in set terms against the gods;
Whereat I went with Regner at my foot.
But when I came, he pushed aside his dish,
And raised his eyes, and blessed me and the child;
Then sat stone-still, in meekest humbleness.
I asked him, 'What wrong thing the gods had done?'
Then forth there broke the music of his voice
About a dear God Christ, who hung on tree
While His own children pierced his tender side.
Quoth he, 'This English land belongs to Christ,
And all the souls upon it. He will come,
And merciful possession take of all.'
He asked me 'if the King was then at war?'
I answered, 'Yes.' Then said he, 'When Lord Christ
Comes to His own, the times of war are o'er.
Upon His raiment there are stains of blood,
But 't is His own, for He can only love.
He never blew a trumpet to the field;
His soldiers are the men who die in fires,

With blessings on their lips for those who stack
The fagots, and who bring the blazing torch;
His nobles, those who have subdued their pride
To the forgetting of a wrong that whets
The sword to think on.' Then his eyes he fixed
Upon the child that hid within my robe,
The while his face grew tender with a smile.
'O baby brow, that yet wilt wear a crown!
O baby hand, that wilt the sceptre hold!
Thou art beloved of our Brother Christ;
He carries all earth's children in His heart, —
His heart more tender than a mother's is.
A child stands ever at the foot of Christ,
And wanders from Him into manhood. Mayst
Thou wander not! And when the resting Christ
Sits in His heaven when the world is done,
Wearing pure souls as jewels in his crown,
Mayst thou shine fairly set!' With that he rose,
Blessing me and the child again, and went,
Leaving his strange words burning in my ear:

And through the night I dreamed a gracious shape
Walked in a garden full of flowers, and full
Of children, — children fair and apple-cheeked,
Children on pallets stretched, — and when the shape
Passed by these last, they smiled the happiest smile,
The wan cheek reddened, from the couch they rose,
And ran among their fellows 'neath the trees.
When at his foot a chain of children broke,
There stood my Regner; and methought, as one
Doth pluck the fairest flower of all the flowers,
In some sequestered hiding-place of spring,
He took him to his heart: and then I woke."

This letter did the grave King ponder o'er, —
Folding it up, then opening it to read,
As if in search of something he had missed.
When evening fell, and the thin crescent moon
Brightened through crimson vapours, and the tower
Glowed in the darkness like a burned-out brand,
The King dismounted, and within his tent

Pored o'er the letter by the cresset light
That, star-like, hung beneath the silken roof.

So, when the robber clan was trodden out,
And all the strongholds razed, — upon a day
Of spring's divinest sunshine, when the breeze
Had o'er the heaven spread the winnowed cloud
As reapers shake the loose hay o'er the fields, —
The King rode homeward with a moody heart,
And all his lords behind, a goodly train.
And when they reached the Palace, in a hush —
For by the weather on the leader's brow
The followers dressed their own — he leapt from steed,
Flinging the careless reins upon the neck,
And entered. In the high hall sat the Queen,
Among her maids. They, singing, sat and span
The carded wool. She silent bent above
A struggling battle-piece of horse and man,
And flying standard, terrible of look.
The red drops trickled down the soldier's brow

Unhelmeted. The central charger, speared,
Rolled a wild eye, and snorted angry breath.
Almost the trumpeter was heard to blow,
Dead man to fall on man with iron sound.
A thing that, billowing on a gusty wall
In blinking fagot light, with strangest life
Might shake a gazer. By her stood the child,
Grave for his years, with a most earnest eye,
Watching the nimble fingers at their task
Upon the pictured folds. In broke the King —
In many a grisly crease the thing crept down,
While Bertha rose and sought his open arms,
And raised a face no higher than his breast,
There to be kissed and kissed. And while he held
The upturned face within his mighty palms,
Like one with a great cloud upon his mind
That makes it dark, he broke out: "Dearest wife,
I cannot rid me of the strange discourse
Thou heldest with the man that came and went.
Can gods supplant gods, as one race of kings

Another? Is there nothing fixed? Will death
Not only heir earth's sceptres, but the homes,
The majesty, the wisdom, and the strength
Of deities that thunder when they speak?
Are farewells said in heaven? and has each bright
And young divinity a sunset hour?
Methought, as I rode past, the temple shook,
And deities a dying murmur made,
Sighing farewell to empire, and to rule.
Ay, the transparent curtain of the air
Hides toil and heart-break and unguessed-of change. —
My Regner." Here the child came to his foot,
All rosy cheek, blue eye, and golden curl,
And chased dark thoughts away; and, while his brow
Cleared, Edwin from the rushes caught the babe,
Tossed him as high 's the roof. "O ho! thou imp,
Wearing a name the dearest to my soul,
Mocking me with thy mother's smile and eye, —
When wilt thou head a gallant company
Where hound and horn make music in the dale?
When wilt thou back a steed? and couch a spear?

And hurl some great king down in tournament
With all the plumage of his helmet shred?
When wilt thou, in the bloody battle press
O'er which thy banner flies, wield axe like him,
The long-haired fellow in the canvas there,
As men were trunks of trees? His sun will shine
In its meridian, wife, when thine and mine
Are low beneath the hills. Thou morsel, thou, —
Thou bud, thou babbling sweetness full of life
From foot to curl. Thou trout in sunny pool,
Thou butterfly in air, thou blue-eyed thing
Crowing despair away, thou —" Here the boy,
Danced up and down upon his father's hands
With baby laughter and delighted eyes,
Was to his face dropped down, drowned in his beard,
And there devoured in kisses, till a noise
Arose outside, like mews that o'er a fish
Clamour and wheel; and then the single voice
Of one made clamant by a mighty wrong
Cried, "Justice, justice, justice for the weak!"

Upon the floor the King set down the child,
And called out, "Let the poor man hither come;
He shall have justice." Then into the hall,
Drawn by the voice, a man came roughly clad
As a sea-rock with sea-weed. Wild his face,
Like one who knew waste places and waste hours,
And had scant share of human fellowship.
And in the hall he stood before the King.

Then Edwin said: "Stranger, whoe'er thou art,
If in my realm an ill thing hath been done,
A maid been wronged, a poor man robbed, a march
Dishonestly been changed, it is my place
To smite the wickedness from off the earth,
Else wherefore is my crown? And do not fear
There is a dweller in this commonwealth
Whose proud head wags o'er law. From lowest hut
To the throne's footsteps, to the throne itself,
Let wrong and wronger perish. But this much, —
I am no idle creditor of tales

Brought by the brushwood 'gainst the lordly oak;
And if a lie within thy story lurks,
It, like a wild beast, will I track and kill,
And desolate the place in which it dwelt.
Wherefore on justice dost thou cry aloud?"

Then like a weir unsluiced the man began:
"I call for swift revenge upon my foe, —
A mighty lord, who heeds me and my rage
But as the moated tower blown thistle-down.
Great King, I had a daughter; only one, —
Dearer to me a thousand times than life;
Sweet as the heather-bell that from afar
Attracts the bee; and by my side she grew
Full fourteen summers, sweeter every year.
One day, O King, the great lord came my way,
And spied the lonely blossom of my life,
And coveted its beauty. It was all
I had, — he, gardens of his own to roam
And pluck at will, where every rosebud cropped

With pride would redden. Mine away he stole,
And with it took the sun from out the sky,
The joy from out my life. I followed him,
Fell on my knees before his castle gate,
And prayed that he would give me back my flower,
Pure as at first; if not, then any way;
Soiled, soddened, withered, of its leaves despoiled,
To me dear ne'er the less. He mocked my grief,
Struck these old gray hairs down upon the stones."

Then rushed to Edwin's temples the hot blood.
"Old man, if this sad tale of thine be true,
The evil lord shall surely die the death,
Though he stand foremost in my roll of knights,
Yea, were my mother's son. What is his name?
However strongly girt by fosse and tower,
Thy voice is his death-warrant."

Then the flame
In the man's face sank low at once. He said,
In broken meekness: "Mighty King, I am

But withered grass beneath the feet of all,
Despised and trodden, nor doth it befit
Me to arraign great lords. And when 't is come
To this, I tremble at the single word
That, once unloosed, will, like the lightning, rend
And spread a desolation far and wide.
In this pure presence also would I not
Blazon the shame of one who beareth arms,
And eats with thee at feast. And therefore, King,
I pray thee, let me in thy private ear
Whisper the name of him that did the thing."

To him then answered Edwin: "Fear, methinks,
Should with the wronger dwell, not with the wronged.
Though all my knights were standing now in hall,
The name should be clear spoken out at once.
The scarlet face but to one man belongs,
To him it sticks forever, not to thee.
Yet if the name of that uncourteous lord,
Which to dishonour's keeping shall be given,

Among the sins and falsehoods of the world,
Ne'er to be rendered back, thou wilt not give
Where best it should be, — standing on thy wrong
In the clear public air, — come with me hence."
The King turned with an angry port; the man
Followed him meekly, stepping like a cat,
With silent footsteps. Hardly had they gone,
Before there twirled the distaff of a maid,
Before the patient needle of the Queen
Renewed its work on arm and brandished spear,
A sharp cry rose, a fall, and then a voice.
Like some pure bevy of white-breasted doves
By a hawk fluttered, skirred the maids, the Queen
Flew to the sound; they, gathered in a crowd,
Flocked at her heel. Against the wall the King
Leaned like one hurt, his hand upon his side,
At his foot the cursed knife; the while the man
Upon the floor lay grovelling like a beast
Whose backbone has been broken by a shot,
His face distort with pain. When these he saw,

The King smiled in that bitter sort which hides
A grievous wound, and mocks it. "Wife," he said,
"This strange wild-cat has scratched me, that is all.
And yet no thanks. For with that tumbled stool
I've crushed the creature to a broken heap
Of agony, that ne'er will bite or claw.
Wherefore against me didst thou lift the knife?"
Whereat the writhing snake with dying lips,
Dabbled with poisonous foam: "It was not I,
'T was Ethelbert that struck thee from the grave.
His spirit passed into me when he died,
And for thy life I hungered as for food.
My hate suborned the world against thy life.
All things were my confederates and spies;
The running stream that caught thy shadow knew
I sought thy life, and told it to the reed.
The myriad grass-blades whispered of thy steps,
As thou didst pass intent on peace or war.
The flower from out its covert leaned and watched;
The forest leaves took note of thee, and made

A murderous murmur to my greedy ears.
Aided by grass and flower, I found thee; struck, —
Struck home, as thou struckst home. O mighty King,
A poor fool hath o'erreached thee. Thou didst boast,
The cunning'st lie thou couldst nose out, as hound
The skulking fox. I led thee through a land,
The foxes' trail was rank on bush and brake,
Where was thy scent then? With a lie I fanned
Thy virtuous rage for justice, made it flame
Fiercely 'gainst nothing. Dying folly mocks
A dying wisdom. Take my hand, great King,
For we are fellow-travellers on the way
To death's void darkness." At this Edwin stamped:
"Ho, Offa, Cedric! I've blown the candle out,
But yet the wick stinks foully." Then he reeled
And caught at something in the deathly mist,
But Bertha stayed him. By supporting arms,
Slowly the wounded man was led to couch.
And there for many a weary day and night
Low lay the princely pillar of the state,

And by his side, but by him all unheard,
His mother wept aloud like blustering March,
Bertha, like breathless April, close and still.

BOOK IV.

Seven days and nights the Queen sat by the couch
With cooling cup and pillow-smoothing hand,
And propped the wild and matted head that throbbed
With fiery veins. In watches of the night
She weeping heard, like some clock out of gear
Striking strange hours, the cool and temperate lips
Rave of a battle lost and hasty flight,
And of a hate that chased him over the land,
And of a stone without a traitor's gate,
And of a spirit that did prophesy
Of ruined thrones rebuilt and deaths of kings,
And of a promised something yet to come
With universal change. The wasteful sea

Of ancient sorrow which was pushed far back
By dyke and laboured mole, till but a sound
Haunted with grief the shores of happiness,
Broke down its barriers, drowning cot and town,
Tillage and blossomed wood, until the caves
Which summer had o'erspread with leaf and bloom,
And all the old sea margins heard again
The wild waves welter and the sea-birds cry.
Seven days and nights the Queen sat by his couch,
The while her tears and kisses were unknown.
The lords, who were to him right hand and left,
On whom he built as on the solid ground,
Were strangers; and the people thronged the doors,
Devouring every morsel of the news
Brought from the sick-room where the King was laid,
For they were helpless as a town whose walls
Have fallen when the foe is in the field.
On the eighth night he fell in slumber deep,
And Donegild and Bertha o'er him hung,
For he lay moveless as the sea at full

Ere the tide 'gins to turn; and when he woke,
He knew the tear-wet faces and the lips
And pressing hands; and slowly glimmered back,
Like something coming out of racking mist,
The man who cried for justice, and the blow,
And then the sharp pain of his unheeded wound.
Each day thereafter like a fairy brought
The King some gift of health, some red to cheek,
Some lustre to the eye. When passed a week
And gathering strength he lay within the hall,
The Queen upon a low stool at his feet
Played with his wasted hand, far dearer now,
In that it had been neighbour unto death,
Than when 't was hers upon her marriage morn,
And in the childishness of her delight
She covered it with kisses. Then the hand,
Warm with the loving roses of her lips,
Slipped from her grasp, and in love's silence stroked
Bright golden hair and happy cheek that leaned, —
And as she spake she smiled at the caress.

"Husband, within the palace of thy heart
I have free range of audience-hall, and room
Where people throng, or where thou sitt'st alone
Holding a thoughtful session in thy soul,
Whither each deed is summoned. Well I know
Each door is wide. But tell me, is there not
Some little private closet in the place
For which I have no key? Is there not one?
A little one? When that dark visitress,
Delirium, through the silent chamber stalked
The sad and sovereign mistress for the time,
She left a door ajar, where horror lay
And perturbation, and a fear that looks
And listens for calamity that moves
Somewhere within the future with no shape.
What spirit was it that did speak with thee?
And what will on a sudden step from air,
To change the world?" Thereat the sick King's hand
Stayed on the hair and on the nestling cheek,
And Bertha's heart beat thick before he spoke.

"I would, my Bertha, thou hadst never known,
Or that the knowledge and the thing had come
Together. That were better far. For oft,
When on me blows the cold foreboding wind,
The clearness of my spirit is made gross
By its own sands. For long my mood of mind
Is that of one on expectation's edge,
Who, having heard a herald's trumpet blow,
Doth wait for what 't is blown for. Seated once,
Years bygone now, without thy father's gate,
At midnight a strange man stood at my feet,
And told me that in battle huge and wide
King Ethelbert would fall with all his lords;
That I should call thee wife, and that my throne
Would be rebuilt; that I should teachers have,
Who knew the secrets in the hand of death;
That once more he would come; — and then like mist
He melted, and again I sat alone.
King Ethelbert and all his nobles fell;
Thou art the truest wife that ever breathed,

Or shared the joys and sorrows of a man;
My throne is 'stablished, and a little hand
Is growing for my sceptre when it falls,
Be that day soon or late. But where are they,
The teachers? And the apparitional man,
When will he reappear? I cannot doubt
The end will prove as the beginning, true.
No summer ever yet did midway pause,
And without wheaten sheaf return to spring.
Who knows? it may be that this same Lord Christ
Of whom thou heard'st, this Christ that seems to break
O'er me like a strange dawn, within whose light
The world takes other hues, may have to do
With that for which I wait." And then the Queen,
With a poor trembling cheer upon her lips
Upbubbling through her blank astonishment:
"Ah, husband, husband! though our lives are wrapt
Within a cloud of wonder, do not fear;
The voice hath only half fulfilled itself;
Good hath its half fulfilment been; much good

For us is on the way." And as she leaned
Her head against his side, she hardly felt
The gaunt hand wandering over hair and cheek.

But ere King Edwin's bitter hurt was whole,
He hungered for the whirr of windy mills,
And din of carpenters among the ships.
While chained with weakness to a painful couch,
It irked him to be like a mossing stone
Within the hearing of the running stream.
Cooped up, his thirst for noble action towered
At times unto the captured lion's mood,
When all his waste of burning sand and sky
Shrinks to a twilight den, which his disdain
Can measure at a stride. Once, as he lay
Stretched weak in hall, there came a hasty man,
Astonishment depictured on his face,
And told the King a ship lay on the sands,
And from it issued strange and foreign men.
Unknowing what the strangers might portend,

Straightway he rose from couch and sat on steed,
Gaunt, fever-wasted, pale with conquered pain;
And as he rode adown the narrow street,
His lords behind, he broke the silent air
To murmured blessings, for at unwonted sound
Of hoofs each window was with faces crammed;
The black-browed armourer on the anvil left
His hammer, and stood gazing from the door;
The woman held her child up as he passed;
The beggar's hand forgot to stretch for alms;
The girl laid down her pitcher. With an eye
That softened, slowly through the town he rode,
And, slowly issuing from the gate, he spurred
Along a rude sea-bank of mounded sand
'Gainst which the universal glitter flowed,
With a sharp face that reddened in the wind.
But ere the foam was churning on the bit,
He saw a crowd of people seaward look,
As at some strange thing happening on the earth:
And, riding down upon a yellow bay,

From which the unseen moon had drawn the tide,
He drew the rein with wonder. In the bright
Fringe of the living sea that came and went,
Tapping its planks, a great ship sideways lay,
And o'er the sands a grave procession paced,
Melodious with many a chaunting voice.
Nor spear nor buckler had these foreign men;
Each wore a snowy robe that downward flowed;
Fair in their front a silver cross they bore;
A painted Saviour floated in the wind;
The chaunting voices, as they rose and fell,
Hallowed the rude sea-air. On these the King
Stared wonder-stricken, — marble horse and man
Not more bereft of motion. All the lords
Sat silent and wide-eyed. The foremost man,
Who seemed the leader of the white-robed train,
Unbent, although his beard was white as snow,
And the veins branched along his withered hands,
Spake, while to Edwin he obeisance made.
"To thee, who bear'st the likeness of a king,

'T is fit that I should speak, that thou may'st know
What is the business of thy servants here.
We come to traffic not in horse or man,
Corn, wine, or oil; nor yet to gather gold,
Nor to win cities by the force of arms.
O King! we came across the dangerous seas
To win thee and thy people from the gods
Who cannot hear a cry or answer prayer,
Unto the worship of the heavenly Christ,
Of whom thou art the eldest son of all
That in this nation dwell. We are unarmed;
'T is in thy power to strike us through with spears,
To stake us in the pathway of the tide,
To burn us in the fire. Within thy hands
Thou hast our lives. But yet we trust in Christ,
From whose pure hand each king derives his crown,
And in whose keeping are the heavenly worlds,
No harm shall us befall. We bring thee Christ,—
The Christ before whose coming devils flee,
Idolatrous fires burn low, and horrid drums,

Beaten to drown the shrieks of sacrifice,
Are covered o'er with silence."
Then the King
Stirred from his marble trance, and colour flashed
Across his face, as something in his soul
Murmured, like a reverberating cliff,
The apparition's words without the gate
Of Redwald on the night he sat alone;
But straightway he possessed himself and spake:

"Within my realm no harm shall thee befall;
And as thou hast into my kingdom come
So far, and art desirous to make known
Thy spirit's dear inheritance of truth,
Or what thou deem'st its dear inheritance,
Thou shalt have sustenance within my towns,
And lodgement as is fit. Nay, more than this:
To-morrow, here, beneath the open sky,
Where magical arts are powerless, will I bring
In council all my lords, and ancient men

Who have inherited wisdom with their snows,
To give thee patient hearing. For myself,
Although not minded to desert the gods
My fathers followed, and beneath whose sway
The happy seasons still have come and gone,
I keep an open door for thoughts and men
That wear strange clothes and speak with foreign tongues;
Such hospitality befits a king."

Thereat the King and all the knights returned:
Them the procession followed, with the folk
Dispread on either side in cloudy wings.
And when the priests, the cross before them borne,
Beheld the city in the yellow light,
And all the King's train riding to the gate,
Sudden a choir of silver voices rose:
"Lord Christ, we do beseech Thee in Thy grace,
Let not Thine anger 'gainst this city burn,
Nor 'gainst Thy holy house, for we have sinned!"
And so they sang until the gate was reached.
There, like a stream that fretting on a stone

Is on itself pushed back, the tumult grew ;
At last, from out the struggle and the press,
Adown the street the white procession flowed,
And, like a rookery that starts on wing,
And hangs a noisy blackness in the air,
The town was uproar, till a courteous knight
Sent by the King, into a dwelling wide,
Right opposite the palace, brought the priests,
And closed great doors upon a crowd close pressed
And jammed like wethers in a fold. And then,
As the tumultuous rookery that wheels
Above its ancient trees subsides at last,
Each bird beside its nest upon the bough,
And caws itself to silence, all the mass
Dense-wedged split like an ice-floe in a thaw,
Then gathered into clumps of twos and threes,
And, ere the evening, from the street withdrew
To babble of the wonder by the fire.

And when the town had brawled itself to rest,
Edwin went privately unto the priests

To further learn of Christ, and stayed a space.
Then he came back and sat beside the Queen
And talked of all the wonders of the day;
But with a mind confused, and blurred by doubt,
And indistinct, as in dim-weeping dawns,
When wreaths of mist are stretched from tree to tree,
The landscape which a man knows as himself!
And when she like a star had set, he turned
The matter o'er and o'er within his mind,
And broke out with a touch of fretfulness,
For his deep wound twinged sharply: "If 't were but
The building of a city or a ship,
Defence of threatened frontier, anything
That may be compassed by apparent means,
And, being compassed, brings apparent good!
This Christ has ne'er been seen by living eye,
His voice has ne'er been heard by living ear,
And if beneath his banner I enlist,
Service life-long, obedience absolute,
Strict abstinence from all ambitious thoughts,
Stern curbing of the war-horse in the heart,

Are needed; and long years of purity,
That shame the honour of a knight, that shame
The nobleness of kings. War is forbid;
I must forgive the man that injures me.
What if, when I am on a death-bed laid,
Hoary with painful years, no Christ should be?
I have my spirit tortured for a dream;
The man who wrongs me insolently laughs;
And unenlarged my kingdom for my son;
And unembalmed by victories, my name
Will perish like a nothing from the earth,
Unrescued by a harp-string. Could I place
This Christ within the temple of the gods?
One must be right! But then this man brings Christ
To save me from the worship of the gods,
To smite in dust their shrines. Divinities
Are jealous of divinities. They may
Forgive the worshipper; they ne'er forgive
The proud thing praised and worshipped. It is kill,
Kill, kill, and overturn!" So thus and thus
From divers points the King's mind blew, until

The lamp was fading, and forgetful sleep
Hung on the weary eyelid. Then he rose,
Stepped to his boy and kissed him, as he lay,
Round, rosy-cheeked, beneath a cloud of curls;
And sought his couch until the early dawn.

But till the dawn he slumbered not, for — like
A rude petitioner that presses suit
In the market-place, and, urgent, dogs the heel
Of him, whose word is grace, to audience-hall,
And thence to private chamber — yet unlaid
By an irrevocable yea or nay,
The thing pursued him to his couch, unchanged,
Confronted him in dream. So, when the town
Was growing white with dawn, the King, to 'scape
The tyranny of thought that made him toss
From deep to deeper fever, and suborned
Against his peace the motions of the blood
That beat and surged against his ear, arose
And clothed himself, and hasted out to bathe
In cool gray light soft flowing from the east,

Scented with dewy woods, and in its heart
The chirrupings of newly-wakened birds.
Dawn struck on fevered forehead, and on eyes
Reddened with watching, as he paused to look
Upon the glimmering city, stretching out
In slumber's silent trustfulness; no sound —
The white light pouring down on wall and roof,
The secure raven flying low — that lit,
And from the temple croaked. "Ah, little town,
Round which I am a wall, which I have fed
As tenderly as e'er a parent bird
Its nest of callow young, which I have kept
As shepherd keeps his sheep, — the thing I do,
The way I turn in this grave matter scoops
A channel for thy flow to good or ill.
This thing, though clamant, is ungraspable,
Bodiless, airy, and transacts itself
In spiritual regions all unbreathed,
And strange, as is a new-created world
Unprinted by a foot. I am a staff
Placed upright on the ground, and have no power

To fall this way or that, but fall I must,
And by the way I fall shall Deira grow.
Unwise, irresolute, it is my doom
To lift on high my voice, and at my voice
A future with an unimagined face
Will break on thee and me." Thereat the King,
(As on the night he sat without the gate,)
With unknown terror shook from head to heel,
And lo! there stood within a lane of dawn
A folded shape, that, slow advancing, laid
A hand upon his head, and at the sign
So well remembered, waited for through years
With a desire that called it, and again
With blood chill-streaming and a cowering heart,
Edwin fell on his knees, and then the Shape:
"Kneel not to me, but to the heavenly Christ!
Have not the things I promised come to pass?
Have I not sent Paulinus, as I said?
To his instructions give attentive ear,
And bring thy people also unto him,

That Christ may be the Lord of all. And know,
This fertile island in the narrow seas,
Parcelled in seven states that fret and fume
Fiercely against each other, shall grow one,
And a far distant son of thine shall sit
Within its capital city high enthroned,
The crown upon his head. The crown from Christ
He will receive on coronation day.
The kingdoms and the nations of the earth
Are tools with which Christ works; and many He
Hath broken, for the metal faithless proved;
And many He hath thrown aside to rust
In a neglected corner; many worn
With noble service into nothingness:
This England, when 't is tempered to His need,
Will be His instrument to shape the world
For many a thousand years. O mighty Prince,
Within the East is born a day of days,
For Christ this day will to thy kingdom come,
And seek therein to dwell. Be faithful thou,

That faithfulness may live from king to king."
At this a ray smote Edwin on the face,
Each dew-drop twinkled gem-like on the thorn,
And with wet wing from out the fields behind
A lark rose singing, and when Edwin looked
He was alone with sunrise on the hills.

The town that morning was all ear and eye,
There was no sound of shipwrights on the beach,
The wind twirled empty mills, the armourer's fire
No bellows blew to crimson. Like a stream
On which frost lays his hand, all work stood still.
The child looked up into its father's face,
And, seeing what it could not understand,
Sat still and played not. As the morn drew on,
A voice, the clatter of a passing hoof,
Crammed every door with faces. Then the folk
Gathered in groups to stare upon the house
In which the priests were lodged, and strove to shape
In ignorant wonder what event was ripe;

And now the stirring palace took the pulse,
And raised the flying rumour which o'erswept
The crowd, as wind a wheat-field. Now one rode
As if in haste adown the narrow street,
One oped a palace window and looked forth,
One tightened girth of steed. Conjecture made
These nothings monstrous as the shade that stalks
Along the shining vapour 'mong the hills
When the red sun is at the herdsman's back.
Then while the crowd was growing more and more,
The knight went from the palace for the priests:
And then King Edwin and his nobles rode
Adown the street and issued from the gate,
And half the people thither ran; and now
From out the dwelling streamed the holy priests,
With silver cross and Saviour raised in air,
Each clad in snowy vestments, and they sang.
The clear sweet voices and the gleam of white
Drew mothers forth that held their babes to breast,
And tottering children, and infirmest men

That by the fire had sat for many a year
Discoursing querulously of stitch and ache,
Till, like a hay-field reft of all its cocks,
Or like a beach at ebb with yawning caves,
Silent and tenantless the town was left.
Awhile the crowd surged at the narrow gate,
And then it poured upon the ample down
Beyond, where by commandment of the King
They all were seated crescent-wise on grass.
He and his lords and gray-haired counsellors,
Dismounted, stood within the tapering rings,
With them the white-robed priests. In front the sea
Stretched leagues of frosted silver; on one side
The temple stood, dark with a passing cloud.

And then the King spake out right clear and loud,
Heard by the multitudes on either side:
"Demons and gods have power beneath our roofs,
But not beneath the azure. Pure, soft light
Disarms them, makes them innocent; and so

I've brought my people here to list thy words.
Friends, a strange bird has flown from o'er the sea
Into this air of England. Here it sits,
And here it meditates to build a nest.
'T is in our power to scare the bird away,
'T is in our choice to let it build and breed.
What say ye? Shall it go, or shall it stay?"

There was a silence for some minutes' space:
At last from out the circle of the priests
Stood Coifi, giant-moulded, bred of priests,
And highest 'neath the gods: and though debarred
The use of spear or steed, his soul was aye
A broad-disked flower at gaze on battle's sun.
He never knew contentment, and his mood
Was stormful, passionate, as the mountain land
Where 'gainst the rocky barrier streams the blast,
Where the red torrent flays the gorge's throat,
The passing sunbeam smites the rainy ledge
Making it wildly shine, — and thus he spake

Fiercely, but with the fierceness curbed and reined:
"O King, consider well what shall be said,
For truly the religion we uphold
Seems to me barren, virtueless, and dead.
What benefit is there in churlish gods,
That take our rolling incense and our prayers
And give us nothing in return? The dogs
That follow at our heels we now and then
Requite with a caress, and throw them bits
From out the very dish on which we sup.
No one of all thy people more than I
Hath worn his knees, but brighter many know
Thy countenance than I; more prosperous
In all their undertakings are than I.
Now if the gods are good for anything
They would advance their faithful worshipper.
The man that season after season tills
A field that yields no crop, grows tired at last,
Curses its barrenness and lets it stand,
And takes to others; of his mind am I.

Giftless the rich churl's as the beggar's hand:
Whether the gods are churls or beggars, this
I know, that they have given naught to me,
Nor do I think their hands will e'er relax;
And so, if these new doctrines promise more,
We should accept them, King, without delay."

Thus Coifi, visaged like the thunder-cloud
That steeps the crag in lurid purple. Then
Rose Ella, hoary with a hundred years,
Who dreamed his life away, afar from men
As glimmering wraiths of twilight in old woods
That into nothing flit from oak to oak
Whene'er comes human footstep; and his smile
Put all in memory of those days in spring
With sunshine covered, but whose sunniness
Foretells an earlier coming on of tears
Than even gloom itself. "To me," he said,
"To me, O King, this present life of man
Seems in comparison of unknown time

Like a swift sparrow flying through a room,
Wherein thou sitt'st at supper with thy lords,
A good fire in the midst, while out of doors
In gusty darkness whirls the furious snow
That wall and window blocks. The sparrow flies
In at one door, and by another out,
Brief space of warm and comfortable air
It knows in passing, then it vanishes
Into the gusty dark from whence it came.
The soul like that same sparrow comes and goes;
This life is but a moment's sparrow-flight
Between the two unknowns of birth and death:
An arrow's passage from an unknown bow
Toward an unknown bourne. O King, I have
This matter meditated all my days,
And questioned death, but with no more effect
Than if I shouted 'gainst a stormy wind,
And had my words dashed back in my own face.
If therefore these new doctrines bring me light,
All things I would renounce to follow them."

He ceased: then, at a signal from the King,
The gray Paulinus, in his robe of white,
In front of all his white-robed followers,
Upraised a hushing hand, and all was still.
"Fair island people, blue-eyed, golden-haired,
That dwell within a green, delicious land,
With noble cities as with jewels set,—
A land all shadowed by full-acorned woods,
Refreshed and beautified by stately streams,—
We heard this island with its climate pure
Was given o'er to heathen deities:
That these were worshipped with the bended knee,
Unholy fire, and smoke of sacrifice.
And we are come to smite the deities,
And to the idolatrous temples set the torch.
For this we took our lives within our hands,
For this we drew a furrow through the sea,
And this we will accomplish ere we die.
And furthermore we come to speak of Christ,
Who from his heaven looked down, and saw a world

Crimson with stains of wicked battle-fields,
And loud with the oppressions of the poor;
And, moved with gracious pity, wrapt the sun
Of his Divinity in a mortal cloud
Till it was tempered to our human sight.
And for the love he bore the race of men,
Full thirty years ungrudgingly he breathed
Our human breath, endured our human needs,
Hungered and thirsted, oft without a home.
Though but a man he seemed, such virtue dwelt
Within the compass of his mortal frame,
That poor and forlorn creatures, near their death,
Touched by his garments were made instant whole.
And all the time he lived upon the earth
He cast out devils, gave the blind their sight;
With slender store of loaves and fishes fed
A hungry multitude close-ranged on grass;
And, walking on the waters, with a word
Made all the roaring lake of Galilee
Sink to a glassy mirror for the stars.

Yea, at his word a three days' buried man
Came forth to light with grave-clothes on his face.
And when the times of wickedness were full,
When by the vilest city in the world
Nailed to a cross upreared against the sky
He hung with malefactors, — dismal sight
The sun dared not to look on, — with a prayer
For him who pierced his body with the spear,
For him who tore his temples with the thorns,
For him who mocked his thirst with vinegar,
The Lord Christ, bleeding, bowed his head and died;
And by that dying did he wash earth white
From murders, battles, lies, ill deeds, and took
Remorse away, that feeds upon the heart
Like slow fire on a brand. From grave he burst;
Death could not hold him, and ere many days,
Before the eyes of those that did him love,
He passed up through yon ocean of blue air
Unto the heaven of heavens, whence he came.
And there he sits this moment man and God;

Strong as a God, flesh-hearted as a man,
And all the uncreated light confronts
With eyelids that have known the touch of tears.
Marvel not, King, that we have come to thee.
If but one man stood on the farthest shore,
Thither I would adventure with the news,—
News that undungeons all from sin and fear.
The glimmering wisp, the sprite that haunts the ford,
The silent ghost that issues from the grave
Like a pale smoke that takes the dead man's form,
Can scare us never more, for Christ made all,
And lays his ear so close unto the world
That in lone desert, peril, or thick night,
A whispered prayer can reach it. In the still
Abyss of midnight lives a human heart,
And therefore all the loneliness and space
And all the icy splendours cannot freeze.
Coifi, I bring to thee no churlish God:
A heaven-full of reward he has for those
That love and serve. And thou, most ancient man,

For ever musing on a grassy grave,
Death is a dinted couch; for there a space
Christ's limbs have rested, and that knowledge takes
The loneliness, which is death's fear, away.
And in the light beyond earth's shade He sits
With all the happy spirits of the dead,
Silent as garden flowers that feed on air,
And thither thou wilt join Him in due time.
O King! O City! seated on the grass
We have unpacked our bales. Christ cannot come
Where any idol is; so burn them down.
King, be the wind to blow these clouds away,
That Christ's clear sky may overarch thy land."

He ceased; but on the hem of his address,
Ere yet a man could say that he had ceased,
Cried Coifi, while his face in splendour broke,
And shone among the others dark with doubt;
As, when a day of rolling vapour dims
A waste of congregated pool and mere,

One, smit by sunshine from a cloudy rift,
Glitters among the gloomy brotherhood,
And wears the gleam while all the rest are dark:
"O King, give ear unto the stranger's words,
Surely the truest, best that ever ear
Gave welcome habitation to. For long
To me the worship of the native gods
Was emptiness and vapour; and if truth
In that religion dwelt, 't was spectre-like
And fleeting as the rainbow in the shower,
That ever shifts its place and flying smiles.
In this new doctrine, if I judge aright,
Truth lives not like an unbroke skittish colt
That never yet has known the touch of man;
That starts, and whinnying flies, if but a head
O'ertops its pales, or any noise is made, —
But in contentment, like the paddocked steed,
That has a life of noble service led,
And fears not the approach of any man,
May saddled be and used. The deities

Are but the mighty shadows of ourselves,
And reach no higher than our highest moods.
But this Christ has existence all untouched
By fond imagination or unbelief:
And, being Lord, the richly furnished world
Is an unemptied treasury of gifts
For those He loves; and on rebellious men
He has for executioners the sea,
Snow-drift and sun-fire, blast and thunderstone,
Earthquake and shivering lightnings red with haste;
All good is resident within His smile,
All terror in his frown. And therefore, King,
It seems to me expedient that the gods,
Voiceless and empty-handed as our dreams,
Should be at once forsaken, and the torch
Be set unto the temples we have built."

And when the full-heaped wave of Coifi's words
Broke sudden in a wreath of dying foam,
The King arose, and with him rose a sound.

"Ye strangers who have come across the sea,
Ye people who have known me all my days,
I here, in seeing of the earth and sky,
Unclothe myself of the religion dark
Which I and all my forefathers have worn,
And put on Christ, like raiment white and clean.
To this I am not urged by wantonness,
Nor by a weak and giddy love of change.
This thing I have considered o'er and o'er,
And, when my spirit wavered, it was fixed
And clamped unalterably as with iron
By spiritual visitors and signs;
And that these spiritual signs and shapes
Were offspring of no over-heated brain,
This kingdom I am king of is the proof.
Ye priests, I take allegiance unto Christ;
My crown I wear as vassal unto him:
This day I Christ as my commander take,
And as his faithful soldier will I live,
And as his faithful soldier will I die.

And as the dawn from out the heaven comes,
And on the craggy mountain's highest peak
Kindles a fire, then, falling lower, breaks
In splendour on the fortress on the crag,
Then rosy makes the solitary mere
Deep in the wrinkled armpit of the hill,
Then strikes a rainbow on the cataract,
Then with a sunbeam wakes the misty vale,
Till in the light the little children laugh
And over all the world is morning, — so
From me, who am the highest in the state,
This new religion will step down to priest,
From priest to noble, and from thence through all
The ranged degrees that make a commonwealth,
Until it reach the labourer soiled with clay,
And Christ will o'er us rule in perfect peace.
But being now his soldier, it is meet
That I make war upon his enemies;
Who of my priests and nobles standing round
Will first profane the temples of the gods

And all the dark enclosures sacred held?"
Then Coifi, without pausing, answered: "I,
For surely of thy people it befits
No one so well as him who was their priest.
If I the dwellings of the gods outrage,
With a forbidden horse, unlawful spear,
And smite them, and return again unhurt,
What then? Yon ancient boulder on the hill,
That wears obscure the features of a man,
Is strong, divine, and worshipful as they.
But if the blow and clangour of my lance
Should pierce the stony calm, and draw a voice
And lightnings that will blast me, I but die;
And by my death I bring the gods alive,
And in the fairer summers that will come
My name will be remembered oft with praise.
The profanation of the gods is mine;
Provide me, King, a stallion and a spear."
Thereat arose confusion manifold,
And one perched on an eminence might see

That through the crowds that stood stock-still there ran
Meandering currents, like the ruffled belts
That bend and waver through the oily calm
When noonday lies in slumber on the deep.
Soon from the tumult running footmen broke,
Leading the coal-black stallion of the King,
That plunged and neighed, his knee and counter dashed
With foamy flakes, and on him Coifi sprang,
Priest-vested as he was, and curbed and reined
The mighty brute as though his heels were armed,
And loud cuirass and greave his daily wear.
While with his hooves the stallion bruised the turf,
Coifi leaned sideways, stretched a hand and caught
A glittering spear, and, poising it, gave rein
And rode toward the temple, and the crowd,
Deeming the priest stark mad or brain-distract,
In that he was so covetous of death,
Broke after him in wild and shrieking lines;
But Coifi struck them marble as he crashed
Through the enclosures ever sacred held,

And gained the central space unharmed, and rode
Thrice round and round, then in his stirrup stood,
And, with a high defiance on his lip,
Smote, with a clang, an Idol, monster-faced;
And as he smote, the foul thing, reeling, fell,
Fell Dagon-like, face downwards on the grass.
And when from every heart the icy hand
Of fear was lifted, sea-like grew the noise.
And Coifi shouted something from the place,
And, as in answer to the half-heard shout,
King Edwin's voice the mighty uproar clove:
"Consume with fire the idols and their homes;
Burn stake and god together!" And the cries
Within the crowds a sacred fury wrought,—
The deities were tumbled on the grass,
The pales and the enclosures were torn down
By naked hands and flung into a heap,
And one a torch applied; and through the smoke
There flickered here and there the fiery tongues
That crackled, spread, and ever higher climbed;

Till the scorched beam came thundering down, and towers
Of flame rushed up, then licked the air and died.
And when the world was quivering through a film
Of furnace-heat that shook in welling lines,
And a great smoke rolled off and seaward spread,
And dimmed the gleam from headland on to cape,
And ever louder grew the swarming crowds,
The white-robed priests together standing sang:
"Down falls the wicked idol on his face,
So let all wicked gods and idols fall!
Come forth, O light, from out the breaking east,
And with thy splendour pierce the heathen dark,
And morning make on continent and isle,
That thou may'st reap the harvest of thy tears,
O Holy One that hung upon the tree."

So, when the temple lay a ruined mass,
And the gorged flames were low upon the brand,
And a great vapour breathed across the sea,

King Edwin called his people; and they came
Long line on line as tide sets to the shore.
And then he pointed to the smoky blot
Athwart the sea-light and the peaceful sky.
"Behold our old religion hanging there,
Behold it dying in the heavenly ray;
So dies the error of a thousand years!
Thee would we thank, Paulinus, but the top
And pinnacle of our indebtedness
No language e'er can scale. Yet would we know
Whose hand it was that reached us o'er the sea."
Then to the King Paulinus answered straight:
"I gladly shall instruct thee, mighty King.
The holy Pontiff Gregory sent us here;
The saintliest spirit after Christ, whose soul
In clearest light and meditation dwells,
And is of his corporeal body free
As is the lark in heaven of its nest;
One day it happed that to the market-place
In Rome Pope Gregory went, and, through the crowds

Of buyers and of sellers walking, saw
A crowd of lovely boys exposed for sale;
Fair-faced were they, white-skinned, and azure-eyed,
And to their shoulders hung the yellow hair.
Moved by their beauty, Gregory inquired
Who were they? from what country they were brought?
And some one said they came from Britain. Then
He marvelled if the isle that bred such youth
Was Christian, or lay yet in pagan dusk;
And those around him told that never yet
That island's tongue had shaped the name of Christ.
Then sighed he from the bottom of his heart;
'Alas!' he said, 'that Darkness and its King
Should such fair creatures in possession hold!
Alas that creatures as the morning fair
Should live with darken'd spirits!' Then he turned,
And went home musing o'er this island's good;
And the desire grew powerful that the tongue
Of Britain, which could modulate alone
Dark idol-prayer and hoarse battle-cry,

Should utter Hallelujah. So when time
Was ripe, at his behest we sailed from Gaul,
Freighted with prayer and the name of Christ;
And landed here. The holy Pontiff's heart,
That aches with the great darkness of the world,
Is this day lightened, for among the tongues
That rise to heaven in prayer, there is one
Ne'er heard by Christ before; another string
Is to the world-harp added, praising Christ.
For what has been accomplished on this day,
Fragrant will Gregory's memory be held
By every race of Englishmen to be.
From out the twilight of unnoted time
The history of this land hath downward come
Like an uncitied stream that draws its course
Through empty wildernesses, and but hears
The wind sigh in the reed, the passing crane;
But Christ this day hath been upon it launched,
Like to a golden barge with burnished oars,
Whose progress makes the lonely waters blush,

And floods the marshes with melodious noise.
And, as that river widens to the sea,
The barge I speak of will dilate and tower,
And put forth bank on bank of burnished oars,
And on the waters like a sunset burn,
And roll a lordlier music far and wide;
And ever on the dais a king shall sit,
And ever round the king shall nobles stand."

Thereafter in a stream that ran to sea
The King and all his nobles and his priests
Were by Paulinus in Christ's name baptized,
And solemnly unto his service sealed.
And then Paulinus lifted up his hands,
And blessed them and the people. But by this
The congregated clouds along a sea
From every fret and wrinkle smoothed began
To wear their evening colours, and the King
Turned homeward priest and noble in his train,

With all the people following full of awe.
And from that day, filled with strange fire, he rode
A mighty Idol-breaker, far and wide,
In battle-gear, Christ following in the print
Of his war-horses' hooves. The fanes he burned
At Goodmanham, at Yeverin, and York,
And Cateret where the Swale runs shallowing by.
To Redwald and his sons he bore the faith,
And sent Paulinus to the neighbouring kings.
Near his own City, where the temple stood,
He raised to Christ a simple church of stone,
And ruled his people faithfully, until,
Long-haired and hoary, as a crag that looks
Seaward, with matted lichens bleached by time,
He sat in Hall beholding, with dim eyes
And memory full of graves, the world's third bloom,
Grandchildren of the men he knew in youth;
And dying, pillow-propped within his chair,
The watchers saw a gleam upon his face
As from an opened heaven. And so they laid

Within the church of stone, with many a tear,
The body of the earliest Christian King
That England knew; there 'neath the floor he sleeps,
With lord and priest around, till through the air
The angel of the resurrection flies.

TORQUIL AND OONA.

The bright brief summer of the western isles
Burst on gray rocks, yet wet with winter's wrath,
When Torquil, the brown fisher of the Kyles,
Courted the blue-eyed Oona of the Strath,

And won her love: and when the beauteous world
Was sweetening onward to the wedding-day,
Great clouds of sea-birds dipped, and wheeled, and skirled,
O'er finny droves in every creek and bay.

And every fisher started to his feet:
All day they laboured with a hearty will,
And wives and children watched the tawny fleet
Stand out to sea beyond the crimson hill.

Save Torquil's only, with the morning light
The boats came laden homewards. One by one
Dragged the long hours, and Oona strained her sight
To pluck a sail from out the sinking sun.

The conflagration of the dawn arose
Upon a woman wringing piteous hands,
With long hair streaming in a wind that blows
White wraiths of foam that beckon o'er the sands;

And ever as she went from place to place,
Along the shore, or up the purple fells,
She saw the glimmer of a drownèd face,
And brown hair trailing in a wave that swells.

And aye she sang of boats upset in squalls,
Of sailors that will never buried be, —
Tossed on the gray wave as it leaps and falls,
And torn by the wild fishes of the sea: —

"Thy mother fondly hung above thy bed,
And clothed thy shoulders with her careful hand;
But now the billow heaves thy naked head,
And haps thee with the blanket of the sand.

"The shirt I made for thee is wet, my dear;
Blue is the mouth I kissed, and blue the nails;
Yet, sleeping by thy side, I would not fear
The coiling sea-snakes, and the shadowing whales."

And, knowing she was dying, oft she prayed —
The sole request for which her heart had room —
That God would pity her, and have her laid
Beside her Torquil in his moving tomb.

A little while and she was laid at rest,
With white hands crossed upon the snowy lawn;
A cruize of salt upon her frozen breast,
And candles burning round her till the dawn.

Her fathers slept within a desert isle,
The dreariest mustering-place of sullen waves,
In midst whereof a gray religious pile
Looks through the misty wind that shrills and raves.

A broken wall surrounds the field of dead;
The gate stands open for no man to pass;
And carven crosses with their runes unread
Lie sunken in a sea of withered grass.

And thither will they bear her; for the Celt,
Although his track comes reddening down with feud
From out the sunrise, evermore has felt,
Like a religion, ties and dues of blood.

The simple people stood around the doors,
And, in the splendour of the morn, a line
Of drying nets flapped round the idle shores;
Brown dulse-beds glistened in the heaving brine.

The kinsmen bore the body to the strand;
Within the boat full tenderly 't was laid,
And, lying there, some reverential hand
Around the coffin wrapt her lover's plaid.

And onward sailed the bark, the while the crowd,
Ranged on the shore, a decent silence kept;
And, while it hung a speck 'twixt wave and cloud,
A mother, lingering, seaward looked and wept.

And when the day along the splintered line
Of purple Coolin sank divinely fair,
And homeward lowed the mighty-uddered kine,
And the long rookery creaked through coloured air,

The men returned. As at a witch's call
A tempest rose, they told, and, as it came
Blackening, it broke, and through the solid squall
Fluttered the linked and many-sheeted flame;

And some one cried, "'Tis Torquil claims the dead";
And how, when in the wave the corse they threw,
The darkness cracked in sunshine over head,
And ocean glittered 'neath the sudden blue.

And one stood listening to the simple folk,—
Old Ronald, by a century of woe
Made hoary as a lichen-bearded rock,
Bent like a branch beneath a load of snow.

He once beheld along the making tide
Pale death-fires burning for a boat, which then
Waited, safe-moored, for bridegroom and for bride,
Grave priest, and troops of dancing maids and men.

Oft sitting by the fire on winter nights,
When round the huts the wind a descant sung
Of wrecks and drowning men, disastrous sights
And ancient battles lived upon his tongue.

So, when the boatmen ceased, and watery slips,
Red-glazed with sunset, faded in the sands,
Gray Ronald stood apart with murmuring lips;
Then, smit with passion, raised his voice and hands:—

"Within the awful midnight of the sea,
Where nothing moves, these twain have found a grave;
Was it for this on windless nights to me
The fatal glow-worms glimmered on the wave?

"Though not for us that tender cure of grief
When the red naked grave that jars and stings
Falls from its shape, and, greening leaf by leaf,
Melts in the mass of long-familiar things,

"Until, upon a sunny Sabbath day,
Within the grassy churchyard friends will stand,
With no sharp pang that the low-mounded clay
Once laughed aloud and stretched the friendly hand,—

"Though from our hearts Time never thus will lure
Remembrance, yet we know the twain that fled,
Happier than we, inherit the secure
And measureless contentment of the dead;

"That they, knit up by death from strokes of ill,
Are with us, fairer, nobler than before,—
Sweet Oona in the sunrise on the hill,
Brown Torquil in the murmur of the shore.

"When the innumerous snow-flake blinds the vale,
And wreaths are spinning o'er the huddled sheep,
When the long reef of breakers in the gale
Roars for men's lives, they dwell in happy sleep.

"Think of them when the summer sunset flares
Down through the world of waters in the west,
And when from shore to shore the ocean wears
A mesh of glittering moonlight on its breast."

BLAAVIN.

O WONDERFUL mountain of Blaavin,
How oft since our parting hour
You have roared with the wintry torrents,
You have gloomed through the thunder-shower!
But by this time the lichens are creeping
Gray-green o'er your rocks and your stones,
And each hot afternoon is steeping
Your bulk in its sultriest bronze.
O sweet is the spring wind, Blaavin,
When it loosens your torrents' flow,
When with one little touch of a sunny hand
It unclasps your cloak of snow.
O sweet is the spring wind, Blaavin,
And sweet it was to me!

For before the bell of the snowdrop
Or the pink of the apple-tree,
Long before your first spring torrent
Came down with a flash and a whirl,
In the breast of its happy mother
There nestled my little girl.
O Blaavin, rocky Blaavin,
It was with the strangest start
That I felt, at the little querulous cry,
The new pulse awake in my heart;
A pulse that will live and beat, Blaavin,
Till, standing around my bed,
While the chirrup of birds is heard out in the dawn,
The watchers whisper, He 's dead!
O another heart is mine, Blaavin,
Sin' this time seven year,
For Life is brighter by a charm,
Death darker by a fear.
O Blaavin, rocky Blaavin,
How I long to be with you again,

To see lashed gulf and gully
Smoke white in the windy rain, —
To see in the scarlet sunrise
The mist-wreaths perish with heat,
The wet rock slide with a trickling gleam
Right down to the cataracts' feet;
While towards the crimson islands,
Where the sea-birds flutter and skirl,
A cormorant flaps o'er a sleek ocean floor
Of tremulous mother-of-pearl.

II.

Ah me! as wearily I tread
The winding hill-road mute and slow,
Each rock and rill are to my heart
So conscious of the long-ago.
My passion with its fulness ached,
I filled this region with my love,
Ye listened to me, barrier crags,
Thou heard'st me singing, blue above.

O never can I know again
The sweetness of that happy dream,
But thou remember'st, iron crag,
And thou remember'st, falling stream!
O look not so on me, ye rocks.
The past is past, and let it be;
Thy music, ever falling stream,
Brings more of pain than joy to me.
O cloud, high dozing on the peak,
O tarn, that gleams so far below,
O distant ocean, blue and sleek,
On which the white sails come and go,
Ye look the same; thou sound'st the same,
Thou ever falling, falling stream, —
Ye are the changeless dial-face
And I the passing beam.

III.

As adown the long glen I hurried,
With the torrent from fall to fall,
The invisible spirit of Blaavin
Seemed ever on me to call.
As I passed the red lake fringed with rushes
A duck burst away from its heart,
And before the bright circles and wrinkles
Had subsided again into rest,
At a clear open turn of the roadway
My passion went up in a cry,
For the wonderful mountain of Blaavin
Was bearing his huge bulk on high,
Each precipice keen and purple
Against the yellow sky.

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